
Corridors of Power, Liberal Peacebuilding and Hybrid Regimes:

Understanding development NGOs in a game of power in the Mindanao conflict

by

Jovanie Camacho Espesor

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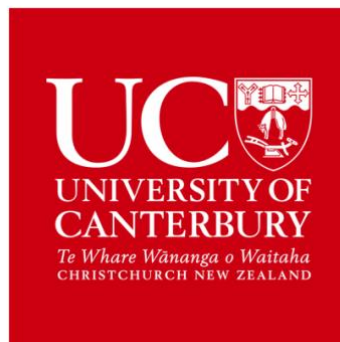
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Abstract

Using critical ethnography and participatory research methodologies, this thesis elucidates the conundrum in the peacebuilding literature, namely, why hybrid peace formation is characterised by tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes that are produced and subsequently reproduced due to the complex interface between the liberal peace and extant power in conflict-ridden polities. Drawing from intensive fieldwork in Mindanao, which has a complex political order, this thesis demonstrates that development NGO-led liberal peacebuilding operations are resisted, ignored, distorted and modified because of perceived harmful impacts to the prestige, legitimacy and multi-faceted interests of local strongmen, who dictate the rules of the game in the conflict zone. Warlord politicians have perceived liberal peace interventions as detrimental to their power and interests. Transforming conflict requires the reconfiguration of repressive power structures to create and widen democratic spaces that accommodate the political participation of previously subordinated and largely powerless war-riven civilians. However, this thesis contends that the liberal peacebuilding of NGOs in Mindanao does not lead to emancipation. Evidence suggests that NGOs help strengthen the resilience of political authority and the legitimacy of local strongmen who have the agency to hijack peacebuilding projects. Moreover, this thesis argues that Mindanao is a lucrative theatre of action for development NGOs due to the constant flow of peacebuilding aid. A slow and arduous peacebuilding process, such as the provision of humanitarian assistance and diffusion of liberal-democratic norms, is ideal to sustain the survival of NGOs and their continued relevance as democratising agents in the conflict zone. The main contribution of this thesis to the peacebuilding literature is the detailed and micro-level ethnographic case study of Mindanao, which offers insights about subaltern power and how it impacts the dominant liberal peacebuilding on the ground.

Declaration

The Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand approved the conduct of fieldwork in conflict-torn communities in Aceh, Indonesia and Mindanao, in the southern Philippines on 3 December 2015.

Some of the data developed for this research have been used in different context in related publications including:

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Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come.

– Robert H. Schuller

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ARHC	ARMM Regional Human Rights Commission
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
AFRIM	Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao
BDA	Bangsamoro Development Authority
BIAF	Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BIFM	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement
BHRC	Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission
BOL	Bangsamoro Organic Law
BUB	bottoms-up-budgeting
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro
CAFGU	Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit
CBCS	Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society
CFSI	Community and Family Services International
CHR	Commission on Human Rights
CISAC	Center for International Security and Cooperation
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	civil society organisation
CVO	Civilian Volunteer Organisation
DILG	Department of the Interior and Local Government
EU	European Union
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
FAB	Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro
FPA	Final Peace Agreement
FSD	<i>Fondation Suisse Deminage</i>
GIDA	Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas
HD Centre	Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
HDI	Human Development Index
LAG	Institute for Autonomy and Governance
IDI	in-depth interview
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IGO	inter-governmental organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMT	International Monitoring Team
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
IO	international organisation
IP	indigenous people
IR	International Relations
IRA	Internal Revenue Allotment
IS	Islamic State
JCCCH	Joint Coordinating Committee for the Cessation of Hostilities

JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
LCE	local chief executive
LGC	Local Government Code
LGU	local government unit
MOA-AD	Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MinLand	Mindanao Land Acquisition, Housing and Development Foundation
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MTF-RDP	Mindanao Trust Fund-Reconstruction and Development Programme
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NPA	New Peoples' Army
NPE	Normative Power Europe
NSAG	non-state armed group
OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
PME	power mapping exercise
PNP	Philippine National Police
PO	peoples' organisation
PSA	Philippines Statistic Authority
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
RtoP	Responsibility to Protect
SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission
TAF	The Asia Foundation
TJRC	Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission
UBJP	United Bangsamoro Justice Party
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN ESCAP	United Nations Economic Social Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
US	United States
WFP	World Food Programme

Chapter I

Introduction: NGOs and the Conundrums of Liberal Peacebuilding

International peacebuilding is a lucrative enterprise for various intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), donor agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) that are actively involved in liberal peacebuilding operations in many conflictual societies, particularly in the global south. It is a multi-billion-dollar industry that sustains the continued survival of NGOs, which have acquired a wide array of expertise in post-conflict emergency relief operations and reconstruction (Riddle 2007; Lewis and Kanji 2009). Some technocratic NGOs have a comparative advantage in the aid industry as they have gained competencies in conflict mediation, resolution and transformation and are, therefore, capable of executing donors' demands within the liberal peacebuilding framework (Mac Ginty 2012; Fowler 1997). NGOs are entrusted to facilitate international development and peacebuilding in many parts of the globe. They have been the "favoured child" (Edwards and Hulme 1995, 849) of donor institutions that are receiving incentives and rewards for their cooperation and contribution in bolstering and intensifying the ideological appeal and practical value of the liberal peace.

NGOs are part of the strategic complexes of the liberal peace and they are major players in the "new wars" (see Kaldor 1999, 4) of the post-Cold War environment (Duffield 2001). They have gained prominence in the institutions of global governance and exert influence on the process of international decision-making and debates on the multifaceted issues of development (Krut 1997). Neoliberal states and international financial agencies are incentivising NGOs to equate globalisation with democracy, development, human rights and choice in their operations, including peacebuilding, in developing countries (Guttal 2007). Consequently, NGOs have gone through waves of politicisation and depoliticisation as strategic actors contracted by donors and IGOs in the areas of neoliberal development and international security and peacebuilding. In the gradual retreat of the state from the provision of public goods and services pursuant to the current development agenda of neoliberal reforms, NGOs are contracted by donors and foreign governments as ideal partners in a privatised mode of social service delivery (Korten 1990; Fowler and Bickart 2008). Their key involvement in this neoliberal agenda of development is justified

using the rhetoric of empowerment, community control, equity and participation, particularly of the invisible and voiceless groups in the global south (Feldman 2005; Butcher 2007).

According to Marchetti and Tocci (2015, 1), NGOs are prominent agents of democracy that are “trapped in the liberal peace.” The *Agenda for Peace* of the United Nations, for instance, accentuates the important roles of NGOs in international peacekeeping and peacebuilding (Boutros-Ghali 1992). Because of the rising tide of technocracy in peacebuilding, which favours NGOs due to their capacity to facilitate democratisation in conflictual societies in a privatised manner, they have been absorbed into neoliberal peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2012). As market players, they work for donors and IGOs in the application of neoliberal economics in conflictual and post-conflict societies. Moreover, the co-optation of NGOs into the liberal peace is mainly due to the securitisation of development (Howell 2014; Hettne 2010; Paris 2001) and peacebuilding (Carey 2012; Newman 2011). In other words, NGOs have become instrumental in the framing of issues of development and peacebuilding in conflict-torn communities in the global south as a security problem.

As key agents of the liberal peace, NGOs are responsible for the diffusion of liberal-democratic norms, values and practices or the so-called Western epistemology of peace in societies that are marred by violent conflicts. The liberal peace paradigm is the dominant and comprehensive model that serves as the peacebuilding blueprint of IGOs and NGOs in many post-colonial and conflictual societies (Jackson 2018; Newman, Paris and Richmond 2009). Despite its popularity and prominence, the liberal peace has received staunch criticism from the best-known critical peacebuilding theorists such as Oliver Richmond, Roger Mac Ginty and Edward Newman. The primary critique raised against the liberal peace paradigm is focused on its hegemonic tendency to impose its cosmopolitan values, knowledge and practices on the global south (Mac Ginty 2010; 2011; Newman et al. 2009). It is insensitive to the local realities and needs of conflict-stricken populations due to its primary goal of maintaining stability and containing conflict (Newman 2011). To some extent, the liberal peace has generated marginalising effects on subaltern knowledge and practices (Richmond 2011), and has thereby motivated resistance from local power brokers in war-torn societies (Mac Ginty 2011). Hence, this dominant peacebuilding model is confronted with ethical crises and dilemmas that question its epistemological relevance and practical utility. The overwhelming number of critiques that question the legitimacy of the liberal peace have led to the emergence of a local or cultural turn in peacebuilding that seeks to emphasise

local actors and their power, relationships and networks in the production of a liberal-local hybrid version of peace (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Paffenholz 2015; Bräuchler and Naucke 2017).

Much of what is written in the peacebuilding literature is concentrated on the strengths and weaknesses of liberal peacebuilding. The current debates on peacebuilding focus on the opposing and contradicting claims in the ideational and ontological value of the liberal peace. Nonetheless, most scholars fail to devote sufficient attention to power on the ground, which is a crucial element in understanding complex realities in conflict-riven communities. The neglect of local power in various scientific inquiries led to partial and less objective understanding of the successes and failures of the liberal peace in many conflictual societies. There is a dearth of study about the impact of local power on liberal peacebuilding because this type of research demands intensive and robust fieldwork. It is, however, difficult to carry out such fieldwork due to the lack of security in conflictual societies. Fieldwork in communities situated in a complex security environment requires substantial financial resources, local language skill, networks and a substantial amount of courage on the part of the researcher to do participant observation in a perilous environment. The failure of scholars to engage and scrutinise local power fully has significant implications in understanding the roles and functions of NGOs that are involved in peace operations, particularly in societies under “hybrid political order” (Boege, Brown and Clements 2009, 13).

1.1 | Central argument and research questions

Hybrid peacebuilding literature attempts to pay consideration to extant power on the ground, which is the major gap in the scholarship on liberal peacebuilding. However, the academic attention devoted to the nature of local power is currently confined to the theoretical level. Such a gap in the current state of knowledge of peacebuilding calls for further elucidation through the conduct of empirically-grounded and ethnographic research with the aim of interrogating the dynamic interface of exogenous and endogenous forces that are often in tension and incongruous to each other. The empirical studies in post-conflict Southeast Asian communities, such as Cambodia (Simangan 2018; Lee 2015) and Timor Leste (Scambary and Wassel 2018) are an important contribution to the hybrid peacebuilding literature. Moreover, the latest studies on the hybrid legal system (Deinla 2018) and confluence of formal and informal mechanisms in the provision of justice and security (Adam 2018) in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) offer an interesting prospect on how legal hybridity can bring about sustainable justice in the southern Philippines. Nonetheless, these studies pay no attention to the tension between exogenous and endogenous architectures of peacebuilding. These recent studies on Cambodia,

Timor Leste and Mindanao have reignited the debate on liberal peacebuilding; however, they are effectively insufficient in helping to understand the complex phenomenon of hybrid peace formation in conflictual polities, particularly in the context of an active and protracted intrastate war.

This thesis aims to address the significant gap in the peacebuilding literature through a detailed case study of Mindanao, which has a complex political regime with strong legacy of violent armed conflict in the southern Philippines. The central argument of this thesis is that *the hybridisation of liberal peacebuilding is induced by local powers that have the capacity to resist, ignore, distort, modify and adapt key tenets of liberalism*. Hence, hybrid peace formation is characterised by tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes that are produced and constantly reproduced when the liberal peace interacts with extant power in conflict-ridden Mindanao.

This thesis seeks to answer the main research question: why hybrid peace formation in Mindanao is characterised by tensions, dilemmas and contradictions? Specifically, I intend to answer the following sub-questions:

1. Why does Mindanao's complex political regime constitute a precarious environment for development NGOs and donors?
2. Why does liberal peacebuilding of NGOs and donors come into conflict with the existing local powers and politics in Mindanao?
3. Do NGOs act as a force for good that empowers powerless civilians, or are they destabilising agents that reinforce the prestige and legitimacy of local strongmen and other power brokers in the conflict zone?
4. How do NGOs diffuse and localise transnational liberal ideas and norms in conflict-ridden Mindanao?

To have a better understanding of the nature and geographies of local power and elicit answers to the research questions, this thesis employs critical ethnography and a participatory research methodology. The employment of an anthropological approach and ethnographic design in this research is in response to the call of some prominent critical peacebuilding theorists (e.g., Richmond 2012; Paffenholz 2015; Paris 2010; Bräuchler and Naucke 2017) to gain an in-depth understanding of how power on the ground can impact on liberal peacebuilding. Moreover, empirical studies that employ a hybridity lens are useful to reveal the tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes that are generated when the liberal peace interacts with local power and politics in the

conflict zone. Empirically-grounded research that relies on intensive fieldwork and a robust methodology in conflict-affected communities offers a unique perspective in analysing the emancipatory promise of hybrid peace formation, where NGOs are major players. First-hand information from the conflict zone is helpful to acquire innovative insights into the limited power of the liberal peace (see Duffield 2001), which contradicts its universal and cosmopolitan claim that peace is intrinsic in liberalism.

The critical scrutiny of the nature and location of extant power in war-torn societies is crucial in generating realistic expectations of the contributions of NGOs to peacebuilding, particularly conflict transformation. Power analysis that takes into critical consideration the context and realities of a conflictual society is useful in understanding the potentialities and daunting challenges confronting NGOs and other peacebuilding actors in their efforts to facilitate power transformation through the diffusion and transplantation of liberal-democratic norms. Moreover, a thorough understanding of power on the ground is important in order to identify spaces where NGOs can safely broaden and expand their involvement in peacebuilding operations, especially in facilitating the inclusion of powerless groups in democratic processes and institutions in war-torn and post-war polities.

1.2 | The academic relevance of development NGOs

The scholarly consideration devoted to development NGOs in this research is due to their significant role in global governance (Duffield 2001), particularly in the area of neoliberal peacebuilding. They are strategic players that have the agency to transport and localise the liberal peace into conflictual societies in the global south through the process of norm diffusion (Lewis and Kanji 2009; Wallace 1997; Acharya 2012). They are the primary actors mobilised, financed and entrusted by donor agencies and IGOs to facilitate democratisation in war-torn polities, using their expertise in relief operations and conflict transformation that is based on a liberal peacebuilding paradigm. The underlying philosophical rationale of this prominent role of NGOs in democratisation is rooted in the assumption that they symbolically represent people's participation. Maybe this is not true in practice, but in some cases, the involvement of NGOs in democracy promotion creates legitimacy (Wong 2012). The legitimising power of NGOs justifies their narrative as important actors that can facilitate democratisation in conflict-riven communities. Nonetheless, these conflict-riven communities are not "virgin territories" (Newman et al. 2009, 23), which simply accept and embrace the Western epistemology of peace that is incongruent to extant powers, beliefs and institutions. It is well noted in the peacebuilding literature that the liberal

peacebuilding of NGOs and IGOs often provokes resistance from local actors in the conflict zone because of its hegemonic tendency and incompatibility with the existing values and interests, particularly those of powerful actors.

In the literature, most accounts of NGOs centre on their role as complementary and contradictory agents of development (Banks and Hulme 2012; Fowler 2011) and social instruments for democratisation (Silliman and Noble 1998; Warren 2011), particularly in communities that have previously experienced authoritarian rule. There is a dearth of study that looks at NGOs not only as agents of development, but also as power players, while they engage in peacebuilding operations. This inadequate scholarly understanding of the involvement of NGOs in the game of power presents a puzzle for scholars in the fields of development, critical security and peacebuilding.

1.3 | Context of the research: Why Mindanao?

The case of Mindanao is useful in the attempt to understand the baffling functions of NGOs in a contested political environment, for four major reasons. Firstly, there is a wide array of international and local NGOs that are involved in peacebuilding operations in the southern Philippines. Secondly, NGOs are major players in the internationally-supported peace process in Mindanao, as liberal peace agents contracted by neoliberal donor agencies and IGOs. Thirdly, the existence of complex political regimes, or of multiple power centres that emphasise the dominance of warlord politicians, has significant impacts on the liberal peacebuilding of NGOs in the southern Philippines. Fourthly, Mindanao offers empirical evidence on how NGOs securitise, hybridise and even legitimise the liberal peace in the context of intrastate conflict.

A brief historical overview of the conflict is helpful to understand the present-day political landscape of Mindanao. I will explain why there are multiple power centres that make conflict in the southern Philippines one that is “complex, multi-layered and defies simple explanation” (Adriano and Parks 2013, xi). Different powerful actors ranging from warlord politicians, customary leaders, rebel commanders and terrorist personnel have manifold motivations to wage localised violence continually, and therefore sustain conflict in this war-torn region (see Cordell and Wolff 2010).

The notion of Foucault (1991) about the diffused and omnipresent nature of power is well suited to describe the geographies of power in conflict-ridden Mindanao. The inability of the Philippine state to maintain a legitimate monopoly of power and to continually impose the rule of law

consequently led to the creation of various nodes of power in the southern Philippines (Espesor 2017a). In this research, I will focus on the major power centres in Mindanao that are under the control of actors who have substantial influence on the peacebuilding operations of NGOs and other external peacebuilding organisations.

Traditional and customary rulers

Prior to the official creation of the Philippine state when the Americans granted independence in 1946 (see Mac Isaac 2002), the southern part of the country was under the *de facto* sovereignty of different customary and religious leaders who were called *datu* or *sultan* (Beyer 1946). According to historical accounts, there were three sultanates in Mindanao that pre-dated Philippine independence. These were the Sultanate of Sulu based in Sulu which had jurisdiction over the Zamboanga Peninsula; the Sultanate of Maguindanao in south-central Mindanao; and the Sultanate of *Pat a Pongampongko Ranao*, which had dominion over the eastern and central portion of the Island of Mindanao (Adriano and Parks 2013).

According to Abinales (2009a, 416), when the US Army occupied the Moroland, it succeeded in destroying the Muslim sultanates and gained control over the “recalcitrant *datu*s.” The Moroland was also integrated into the colony and its integration became official when the Philippines gained sovereignty after the World War Two. Consequently, the *datu*s lost their sovereign powers and became simple charismatic rulers in their respective communities. Nonetheless, in present-day Mindanao the political clans of Sinsuat, Matalam, Midtimbang, Mastura and Tomawis-Aratuc steadfastly hold to their claims as “rulers by rights and blood in their traditional domain” (Mercado 2010, 20). These noble clans eventually acquired formal political power in Mindanao when members of the royal families were elected into public office. Hence, there are leaders in Mindanao who are actually politician-*datu* hybrids whose legitimacy is rooted in a combination of what Max Weber (1947) called legal, traditional and charismatic grounds.

Warlords of Mindanao

A major sphere of power in the southern Philippines belongs to the warlord clans who are dubbed by Francisco Lara as “ruthless political entrepreneurs” (2009) because of their “corrosive power” (2010, 79) in conflict-ridden Mindanao. The historical rise of warlordism in Mindanao has been sanctioned by some presidents of the Philippines. For instance, the infamous warlord Datu Andal Ampatuan Sr. rose into prominence as the overlord of Maguindanao due to the political backing of former presidents Marcos and Arroyo (Mercado 2010). The first modern kingpin of the

Moroland, Ali Dimaporo gained expanded influence not only in his bailiwick, Lanao del Norte, but also in other provinces in the southern Philippines due to Marcos' overwhelming support (Carter Bentley 1994, 243). Both Dimaporo and Ampatuan have successfully wielded tremendous power in the southern Philippines because they possessed private militias that are employed to instil fear and intimidation in their detractors and enemies (Simbulan 2013). These patriarchs are able to hand down their powers to their sons who have also become notorious politician-warlord hybrids (see Abinales 2009b, 13 December).

These local strongmen are powerful local politicians who are not only equipped with armed power; but they also have multiple sources of power, particularly the control of illicit economy in the conflict zone (Lara and Champain 2009). Lara (2014, 236) boldly claimed that the loyalty of Dimaporo to Marcos was rewarded with money and arms that enabled Dimaporo to maintain his "shadow business in illegal logging and fishponds, gunrunning, and smuggling." These illicit business ventures of Dimaporo thrived as they were protected by Marcos, the ultimate godfather in Malacañang.¹

The existence of warlordism is still evident in present-day Mindanao. Every province and municipality in the conflict zone is the bailiwick of a local boss or kingpin. They may not be as powerful, but their identities, nature and sources of power resemble those of Ampatuan and Dimaporo. They have the capacity both to wield power from formal and informal grounds and to distribute political and economic largesse to less powerful, yet loyal, civilians from licit and illicit sources. It appears that the warlords of Mindanao have attained mastery in fabricating consent and legitimacy. The scholarship of Lara (2014) and Abinales (2009b, 13 December) reveal that the Philippine government tolerated the rise of warlords to counter insurgency and the growing legitimacy of insurgent organisations in Mindanao. Hence the prominent status of warlords as kingpins in their respective domains is arbitrarily sanctioned by the government.

In an insecure political environment, the loyalty of people to warlords is unsurprising because of the capacity of the latter to afford protection to powerless civilians against threats from bandits, rebels and even undisciplined soldiers and policemen. Rood clearly explained this phenomenon:

In the absence of the rule of law, clans are the functional structures that protect individuals, assert claims to resources and respect, and allow a modicum in

¹ Malacañang is the official residence of the president of the Philippines.

certainty instead of a Hobbesian state of nature where there is war of all against all (Rood 2012, 270).

The control of informal institutions, particularly kinship and patronage, is a strategic political tool that sustains power and manufactures the legitimacy of these local rulers. Although they are responsible for instigating localised violence in the southern Philippines (Rood 2012), these patrons are revered because they provide material rewards to their clients. For instance, the former patriarch of the Ampatuan clan, Datu Andal is known for his kindness and generosity (Khorsand 2011). Moreover, these warlords are clever in reinforcing their legitimacy. They are aware of the strong inclination of Muslim people to follow customary rulers (Rood 2012). Traditional titles were also hijacked by these warlord politicians because of their political power and wealth. Controversially, some politicians in Mindanao who are affixing the title *datu* to their names do not have a legitimate basis for hereditary leadership (Khorsand 2011). A comprehensive discussion of the nature and geographies of the power of local strongmen is undertaken in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Belligerents and insurgents

Another domain of power in conflict-affected communities in the southern Philippines is under the control of belligerent organisations. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have successfully installed parallel structures of governance in their respective strongholds in defiance of the sovereignty of the Philippine government. Both armed groups have military infrastructures that enable them to engage in armed skirmishes with the state security forces. These belligerents use the rhetoric of historical and politico-economic injustice experienced by the Muslim people in Mindanao to justify their separatist claims and legitimise their rule in the southern Philippines (see Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005). The local population in Mindanao have felt that they have been excluded and disenfranchised from national development, as evidenced by slow economic growth and the high level of poverty in conflict-torn areas (Lara and Champain 2009). Moreover, the marginalisation of ordinary civilians is aggravated by the vicious and rampant practice of corruption in the use of government funds (Thomas, Kiser and Casebeer 2005) and foreign aid (Lara, 2010) by national and local government officials.

Formed in 1972, the MNLF was the first armed group that instigated rebellion and demanded independence from the Philippines. Through the leadership of Nur Misuari, it signed peace

agreements with the Philippine government in 1976 and 1996 respectively. However, these peace accords failed to stop warfare in Mindanao (Center for International Security and Cooperation², *henceforth*, CISAC 2018; Cordell and Wolff 2010). Due to political and ideological differences with Misuari, Hashim Salamat, an *ulama*,³ formed a splinter group and broke away from the MNLF in 1977. The new armed group was named the New MNLF by Salamat, and was later transformed into the MILF in 1984 (CISAC, 2018). At present, the MILF is the main opponent of the Philippine government (Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005). This rebel group has its headquarters in Camp Darapanan in Maguindanao Province, and it maintains command of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) and controls a substantial portion of territory in the southern Philippines (Espesor 2017a). At present, the MILF is at the negotiating table with the Philippine government. Both parties signed the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement of the Bangsamoro (CAB) (see Bell and Utley 2015). On the other hand, the MNLF remains an active revolutionary organisation that is based in the island Province of Sulu (CISAC 2018). In addition, it is worth noting that the communist New Peoples' Army (NPA) is also operating in some regions, a situation that further complicates Mindanao's politico-security landscape (see Adriano and Parks 2013).

The creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1990,⁴ paved the way for the rise of rebel governance in the southern Philippines. Known MNLF leaders like Nur Misuari, Muslim Sema and Abu Khayr Alonto have acquired formal political powers as elected officials in the ARMM (see CISAC 2018). However, the leadership in the ARMM has been eventually been captured by warlord clans as evidenced by the election of Zaldy Ampatuan, son of Datu Andal, as regional governor in 2005 (Cordell and Wolff 2010). Moreover, as a result of the 2014 CAB, the MILF signified willingness to abandon its separatist claim, dismantle the BIAF and transform into a democratic institution through the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) (Abuza 2014). Hence, MILF leaders are expected to rise as a new circle of political elites in Mindanao because the Congress of the Philippines passed the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL). President Duterte signed this law in July 2018 to enforce the CAB and create the Bangsamoro as a new political entity (see Corrales 2018, 26 July).

² CISAC is a centre of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University.

³ A religious teacher in an Islamic community.

⁴ The 1989 Republic Act No. 6734 established the ARMM (Rood 2016, 67).

Terrorists and extremists

The conflict zone of Mindanao is a site of power that is not exclusively controlled by local strongmen and rebel commanders. The power configuration in the region has become more complex due to the presence of terrorist and extremist organisations that have jihadist tendencies. The most notorious among them is the Abu Sayyaf (Sword of God) that is deeply involved in kidnap-for-ransom activities among American and European tourists in the Philippines. It is reported that this terrorist group has links to international terrorist organisations, especially Jemaah Islamiah and Al-Qaeda (Cordell and Wolff 2010; Houvenaeghel 2015). Abu Sayyaf leader, Isnilon Hapilon, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) and took the Islamic name Shiek Mujahid Abu Abdullah al-Filipini (Liljas 2016, 14 April). Radicalism and violent extremism in the southern Philippines became more evident when the IS-affiliate Maute Group occupied the Islamic City of Marawi in 2017 (Ranoco and Ng 2017).

In summary, the existence of multiple centres of power in Mindanao is closely linked to the continued occurrence of localised violence that is often characterised by vertical and horizontal armed skirmishes among rebels, state security forces, bandits, terrorists and warlord politicians. Violent armed confrontations have often resulted in the death of people, the destruction of properties and wide scale displacement of powerless civilians. The dire situation in conflict-ridden Mindanao justifies the entry of peacebuilding organisations, especially donor agencies and NGOs, to provide emergency relief assistance and facilitate conflict transformation. Nonetheless, the interlocking networks of local power and politics in Mindanao have significant impacts on the peacebuilding operations of liberal donors and NGOs.

1.4 | Expected contributions of the study

This thesis attempts to make contributions to the knowledge of modern-day peacebuilding, particularly in complex security environments. The detailed case study of Mindanao provides insights about local power and how it impacts the dominant liberal peacebuilding on the ground. Specifically, the following are the primary attempts made to contribute to the peacebuilding literature.

Firstly, the dynamic interface between the liberal peace and local power is often framed at the macro and theoretical level. Micro-level ethnographic investigation in the conflict zone is important to identify local factors that induce tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes in the liberal

peacebuilding operations in the Bangsamoro. Although proponents of the local turn push for the inclusion of local actors to emancipate the liberal peace from lack of legitimacy, this research will attempt to show that most of the local strongmen have the agency to manipulate the liberal peacebuilding operations. They have the leverage either to cooperate or to resist liberal peacebuilding interventions, depending on whether it suits their interests. Therefore, they are not ideal agents who can facilitate the emancipation of the liberal peace. Strongmen, mostly warlords, I argue, may perceive the liberal peacebuilding operations as something harmful to their prestige and threatening to their power and legitimacy. If so, paying too much credence to these local power players presents a danger of romanticising the role of ‘illiberal’ and hostile actors, which might facilitate the production of what Hoehne (2013, 199) calls “crippled hybrid”, where extant institutions and local power might weaken the formal democratic apparatus and infringe a state’s authority and legitimacy.

Secondly, although there is an ideological and historical assumption as to the universal appeal of the liberal peace, this thesis will seek to illustrate the limitation of its normative power in complex political regimes, where security is precarious. The thesis will argue that liberal agents, especially NGOs, have to accept negative trade-offs when dealing with local strongmen. Peace interventions then have to be designed in a manner that are not threatening to coercive forms of power on the ground. Consequently, technical aspects of the liberal peacebuilding, particularly human rights and good governance, are largely set aside owing to their perceived harmful impacts on local power. Understanding the tensions, dilemmas and contradictions which undergird hybrid peace formation is crucial in coming up with realistic expectations of the contributions of liberal agents to peacebuilding.

Thirdly, because local power is not given significant attention in the peacebuilding literature and a detailed case study analysis of Mindanao has not been conducted before, this research seeks to offer new insights, which may indicate a need for peacebuilding players in rethinking their modalities and mechanisms for conflict transformation. The powers and networks of local strongmen may need to be taken into careful consideration in designing interventions, particularly transitional justice and decommissioning of rebels and private militias, which aim at transforming conflict in post-BOL Bangsamoro.

Fourthly, this thesis responds to the call of critical peacebuilding theorists to emphasise the importance of ethnographic and empirically-grounded studies in order to gain meaningful

understanding of hybrid peace formation. The power mapping exercise, which is employed in this thesis, may prove useful to illuminate the power dynamics among actors on the ground. Although Mindanao is just one case, it may shed light on the potential impact of local power and subaltern agency to the liberal peace. Hence, if successful, this thesis would indicate the importance of the conduct of more research in different conflictual communities under complex political regimes to generate nuances that lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of hybridity and hybridisation in peacebuilding.

1.5 | Organisation of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter Two contains a survey of the peacebuilding literature that focuses on the absence of local power as an important element in understanding the liberal peace paradigm and hybrid peace model, which guides donors and NGOs in conflict and post-conflict polities. It also presents the conceptual foundation of the study, which stresses the utility of hybridity as an aptly-suited theoretical lens for this thesis. Chapter Three discusses the ethnographic and participatory methodological design of this study. It also explains the ethical considerations, particularly the imperative of ensuring anonymity of most research respondents for security reasons. Chapter Four explains that Mindanao, the NGOs' theatre of action, is a conflictual community under a complex political order. Using a power map, this chapter focuses on explaining the nature and geographies of the interlocking powers of various power brokers and gatekeepers in the southern Philippines. Nonetheless, it is important to clarify that the power map presented in this chapter is not used as the conceptual basis of the thesis, but rather to set out the context of local power dynamics and establish the existence of the complex political regimes in Mindanao. This chapter also elucidates the mechanisms of NGOs when dealing and interacting with different powerful actors in the conflict zone, especially warlord politicians and rebel commanders. Chapter Five presents the provocative findings of the thesis. It provides explanations of the tensions, dilemmas and contradictions that are generated when the liberal peace interacts with extant power, beliefs and institutions in conflict-torn Mindanao. The argument I put forward in this chapter is that local power and politics in Mindanao induce complications in the liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs and donor agencies. NGOs are of immense value as humanitarian organisations that help less powerful groups, especially internally displaced persons (IDPs), indigenous peoples, and women and children, but they also reinforce patrimonialism, thus bolstering the power, prestige and legitimacy of local bosses or political kingpins. Moreover, this chapter explains the paradoxical identity of NGOs operating in

Mindanao. Not all NGOs are agents of the liberal peace. Some of them are responsible for propagating Wahhabism and Salafism, which are militant versions of Islam.

Chapter Six goes on to explain the conflict transformation function of NGOs through diffusion of transnational liberal ideas and norms in the southern Philippines. This chapter focuses on the role of the European Union (EU) in Mindanao because it prioritises norm diffusion over other agendas (e.g., military) and it relies heavily on NGOs for its peacebuilding interventions. This chapter explains the process whereby NGOs localise foreign norms and their targets of norm diffusion. It also presents the reaction of power brokers to the norm diffusion mechanisms of NGOs. Finally, this chapter offers three concurrent reactions of local actors towards transplantation of liberal norms in Mindanao's complex political community. Chapter Seven presents the conclusion by knitting together the findings of the research; it offers some theoretical reflections on the impact of local power on liberal peacebuilding and conflict transformation; and it presents more questions that call for further academic investigation.

Throughout the chapters of the thesis, I accentuate the argument that development NGOs are primarily entrusted by liberal donors and IGOs with the facilitation of democratic transition and consolidation in war-torn Mindanao. Sustained by the material power of their donors, NGOs are mainly responsible for the hybridisation and securitisation of liberal peacebuilding, which often come into tension with extant power forces in the southern Philippines. The democratisation of a contested political environment like Mindanao, where the security dilemma is constantly present, is a precarious but lucrative exercise for NGOs. Therefore, a slow and arduous process of peacebuilding is ideal for conflict transformation to take place and it ensures the long-term survival of NGOs, who are heavily dependent on peacebuilding aid from international donors. To draw an objective understanding of the achievements and pitfalls of the liberal peace paradigm, it is important to empirically scrutinise the activities of its agents in an insecure polity where liberal peacebuilding actually unfolds.

Chapter II

Locating NGOs in the Literature and Theorising Hybridity

This chapter presents a review of the academic scholarship on power and complex roles and functions of NGOs in development and peacebuilding. The purpose of reviewing the development and peacebuilding literature is threefold. Firstly, it sets out the significant elements of the research problems that are identified in this thesis. Secondly, the literature survey seeks to identify the gaps and weaknesses, particularly the problematic and controversial aspects of the literature that require academic attention, in this way explaining the original contributions of the thesis to the academic literature. Thirdly, it looks at the current state of research through an inventory of studies and publications related to the peace operations in the southern Philippines in order to justify case selection for this research.

While this research is situated at the intersection of Political Science, International Relations and Development Studies, I am aware that the issue on peacebuilding has wider interdisciplinary links to other fields, particularly Peace Studies, Anthropology and Security Studies. Hence, these broad fields of academic discipline provide the linchpin for this research. I devote more attention to reviewing the academic works of development and peacebuilding scholars related to NGOs and conflict resolution, in order to identify the gaps and controversies in the literature that call for academic attention. I am aware of the existence of other relevant literature, particularly that which is included in Critical Security Studies, such as the role of NGOs in the privatisation of security in weak or failed states (Avant 2007) and NGOs as global security actors (Burke 2013). Nonetheless, it is important to narrow down the review to key concepts about NGOs, development and peacebuilding in order to establish the central focus of the thesis and set the stage for the central argument. Moreover, a review of published research on Mindanao is given primary attention to justify the case study included in this research. Therefore, I also aim to identify a research gap from the geographical perspective in that there is insufficient understanding and investigation of the complexities of the peacebuilding operations of NGOs, especially the manner in which they engage with the intricate power structure in conflict-torn Mindanao.

The major topics covered in the review of the literature focus on key concepts that are utilised in the analysis of case studies presented in this thesis. The literature review begins with discussion on how NGOs went through waves of politicisation and depoliticisation in the development literature. Before moving into the critical part of the peacebuilding literature, it is important to discuss the nature, scope and roles of NGOs to draw a better understanding of their value as peacebuilding agents. Then it critically evaluates the process through which development NGOs are eventually absorbed into the political economy of peacekeeping and peacebuilding under the neoliberal framework of global development. The review focuses on the roles of development NGOs in creating and reinforcing liberal and neoliberal worldviews in different conflict-prone communities and how external normative ideas of liberal peacebuilding generate tensions and dilemmas when interacting with local power forces on the ground. I also devote attention to the scholarly works that are related to the peace operations and relevant security issues in Mindanao. This chapter concludes with the central argument that the major weakness in the peacebuilding literature is that scholars fail to devote sufficient attention to power on the ground that has impacts on the liberal peacebuilding of development NGOs and donors in the southern Philippines. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion of theoretical and empirical (including methodological) gaps that need to be addressed in this research.

2.1 | Politicisation and depoliticisation of development NGOs

Scholarly interest in the nature and role of NGOs in promoting global development is traditionally situated in the field of Development Studies. For instance, the book *Introduction to International Development: Approaches, Actors and Issues*, edited by Haslam, Schaefer and Beaudet (2012), stresses the key role of NGOs and civil society as international development actors. Other Development Studies scholars also put major emphasis on the critical contributions of NGOs to local development, democratic governance and participatory development (Veltmeyer 2005; 2008), as well as their key involvement in the application and promotion of the human rights-based approach to development (Braniff and Hainsworth 2015; Wong 2012). There is a consensus among scholars that NGOs are an integral part of civil society (Morris 2010; Suleiman 2013) or the voluntary sector (Hulme and Edwards 2005), and that they are playing a key role in facilitating socio-economic development and in addressing the issue of poverty (Ibrahim and Hulme 2011, Tvedt 1998; Shepherd 2000) in underprivileged communities, particularly in the global south. Moreover, prominent scholars like David Korten (1990), Andrea Cornwall (2002; 2004), Alan

Fowler (2011) and David Lewis (1998; 2014) also situate the critical investigation of NGOs in the field of Development Studies.

Development scholars like Murphy and Augelli (1993), Tvedt (1998), Pearce (2011), and Ibrahim and Hulme (2011) argue that the end of the Cold War, which is contemporary to the deepening of globalisation in the 1990s, is a critical juncture in the emergence of development NGOs globally. According to Tvedt (1998), NGOs have earned significant recognition as major players in international development in the post-Cold War policy environment, which has strong leanings towards neoliberal economics and liberal democratic politics. Wallace (1997) and Beate (2013) claim that the new world order that is founded on the principles of liberalism and neoliberalism has created a conducive environment for the rapid growth and rise of NGOs in different parts of the world. NGOs are able to create and claim their shared social space in the field of international development with the function of aiding newly independent states in the global south. With this new arrangement, following the end of the Cold War, development is no longer within the exclusive purview of states, owing to the diffused nature of power in the global economy as argued by Strange (1996).

The development literature demonstrates that civil society and NGOs are nebulous, vague, diverse, complex, contentious and confusing concepts (Crowther 2001; Macdonald 1994; Spurk 2010; Edwards 2011; Fowler 2011). The literature also shows that NGOs have gone through a process of politicisation, as democratising agents who represent the poor and marginalised populations in the global south. NGOs gained prominence and recognition in the area of international development after World War Two. They became important players when development dominated the agenda of inter-government organisations, particularly the UN and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). During this time, the nature of the NGOs' function was highly political, as part of the decolonisation process led by the United States. NGOs have been created and deployed to different communities in the global south to establish a liberal democratic order. They were tasked with democracy promotion by facilitating political pluralism (Edwards 2011) and development in weak states in the periphery that were made up of former colonies and trust territories of different super powers and capitalist countries (Murphy and Augelli 1993). This global initiative towards democratisation stresses the emancipatory character of liberalism in ushering in political stability and development in the global south. Liberalist conventions are deliberately embedded in democracy as a "populist project" (Murphy and Augelli 1993, 79), which

is a mechanism used by powerful states in the west to enforce their neo-colonialist agenda or what Cammack (2014) calls global capitalism in the guise of development in the Third World.

Some scholars like Fowler (2011) and Autessere (2017) identified the weak and poor capacities of governments as the reason for the existence and rapid growth of civil society, particularly NGOs, in the post-Cold War environment. Tvedt (1998) argues that another reason for the politicised character of NGOs is that they were often state-led organisations that were relying heavily on public funds from the state. NGOs are heavily politicised due to their positive characterisation such as their potential to foster social or civic-driven change (Fowler and Biekart 2008; Hilhorst 2003), promote socio-economic development (Fowler 2011; Ulvila and Hossain 2002), influence public policy outcomes through advocacy and lobbying, serve as watchdog that is critical of how the state exercises its power and disburses public funds (Kajimbwa 2006), and act as “exemplars of grassroots democracy” (Van Rooy 2004, 3). However, NGOs that were previously politicised social development organisations have been depoliticised due to the inescapable tide of neoliberalism.

In the neoliberal turn, NGOs have been depoliticised through a new role as a market actor that reinforces the status quo of a globalised world order. The shrinking size of government bureaucracy and the privatisation and commodification of public services (Friedman 1999; see also Cavanagh and Manders 2004) is favourable for the growth, expansion and relevance of NGOs (Cornwall 2007). States in a neoliberal context are no longer expected to function as providers and producers of public goods and services. Rather, they should take a regulatory function and create enabling environments for the private and NGO sectors to deliver services to people who are no longer seen as recipients of public goods and services, rather as consumers and customers (Wallace 1997).

With the apparent demise of state-led development or retreat of the state in public service delivery, a niche has been created for development NGOs to act as major players in the provision of social services, particularly in poverty-stricken communities (Strange 1996). According to Carroll and Jarvis (2016, 6), the proponents of neoliberalism specifically targeted “civil society because of their internal contradiction, generating a political imperative to co-opt, coerce, and internalise the agency of civil agency and redirect it in ways that supports social reproduction and the legitimisation of neoliberalism.”

The gradual retreat of the state from the provision of public service pursuant to the current development agenda of neoliberal reforms makes NGOs as market players contracted by donors and foreign governments as ideal partners in social service delivery (Fowler and Biekart 2008). The depoliticisation of development led also to the depoliticised nature of NGOs. According to Korten (1990, 102), when donors intend to involve NGOs in the implementation of projects, they are looking for “public service contractors” and not voluntary organisations. This new attitude of donors implies that the aid industry is leading towards corporate and business-oriented practices, which finances NGOs to deliver goods and services to people, which was previously the exclusive role of the state, in a privatised mode of social service delivery. The key involvement of NGOs in this neoliberal agenda of development is justified using the rhetoric of empowerment, community control, equity and participation, particularly of the invisible and voiceless groups in the global south (Feldman 2005; Butcher 2007).

The role of NGOs in the neoliberal turn is claimed to be necessary to create “an entity in opposition to state power” (Harvey 2005, 78). Hence, civil society and NGOs have become a locus of oppositional politics that is vital to counter the hegemony of neoliberal states and, therefore, useful in the legitimisation of neoliberalism (Carroll and Jarvis 2016). Their depoliticisation has also led to technocratisation, where NGOs acquired expertise and specialisation in many aspects of social service delivery. For this reason, they have been the “favoured child” (Edwards and Hulme 1995, 849) that is “too close for comfort” (Banks, Hulme and Edwards 2015, 707) to donors. This closeness to donors is strategic for NGOs for them to constantly receive lucrative incentives and rewards for their cooperation and contribution in intensifying the ideation appeal and practical value of liberalism.

Neoliberalism has pervasive impacts on NGOs. They are co-opted not only in the area of neoliberal development, but also in international peacebuilding where the liberal peace becomes the most popular and prominent peacebuilding framework (Jackson 2018; Newman et al. 2009). NGOs have become key agents deployed by various inter-government organisations (IGOs) and donors to implement neoliberal economics in many conflictual and post-conflict societies in the global south. In the next section, I will embark on a critical examination of the peacebuilding literature to show the process whereby NGOs have been absorbed into neoliberal peacebuilding.

2.2 | Co-optation of NGOs in neoliberal peacebuilding

NGOs are not only seen as the primary drivers of international development which are commissioned by donors and IGOs. They also rose to prominence as democratisation agents who are “trapped in the liberal peace” (Marchetti and Tocci 2015, 1). Their role in international peacekeeping and peacebuilding is recognised in the *Agenda for Peace* of the United Nations (Boutros-Ghali 1992). They have been absorbed into neoliberal peacebuilding—a phenomenon conceptualised by Mac Ginty (2012, 293) as the “technocratic turn” because of NGOs capacity to engage in a privatised mode of peacebuilding operations. According to Duffield (2001), NGOs are part of the strategic complexes of the liberal peace and major participants in global governance or new wars in the post-Cold War environment.

The significant roles of NGOs have been emphasised in different schools of thought in conflict settlement ranging from the oldest approach of conflict management (see Babbitt and Hampson 2011; Paffenholz and Spurk 2006; Touval and Zartman 1985), the school of conflict resolution (see Reimann 2004; Bercovitch 1984), the complementary school (see Fisher and Keashly 1991; Diamond and McDonald 1996), and the school of conflict transformation (Lederach 1997; Galtung 1969; 1971; 1990).

Conflict transformation is the leading school in conflict management (Paffenholz 2009), which employs an integrated approach to peacebuilding (Fetherston 2000). It gives primacy to the outcome, process and structure of peacebuilding initiatives to attain long-term success in the peace process (Reimann 2004). It seeks to effectively address various forms of direct, structural and cultural violence. Johan Galtung and John Paul Lederach are the best-known peace and conflict scholars who made immense contributions to the development of the conflict transformation approach. Moreover, the importance of the NGOs role is greatly emphasised in conflict transformation, which borrowed the multi-track diplomacy model (Diamond and McDonald 1996) from the complementary school. NGOs in multi-stakeholder peacebuilding operation are track two actors, who are expected to function as channels between track one actors composed of state, donors and IGOs, and track three actors, who are the civilians at the grassroots (Lederach 1997). They are also useful in building constituencies for peace from top to bottom (Paffenholz 2009).

Despite its popularity and prominence as a peacebuilding framework, the school of conflict transformation is confronted with numerous criticisms from modern peace and conflict scholars like Paffenholz, Spurk, Reimann and Fetherston. Paffenholz (2009) put forward multiple criticisms

of this framework based on her studies of the peace operations in Mozambique and Somalia. Among her criticisms are:

1. Conflict management remains important, but Lederach fails to provide adequate conceptualisation of conflict management, and linkages between tracks are not clear.
2. External actors should only provide support to insiders, who are not given the optimal opportunity to engage and influence other actors in a much larger peacebuilding arena, such as governments and organisations at the regional and international levels.
3. Civil society's role is concentrated on conflict resolution; however, they are also capable of conflict management, as illustrated in the Mozambican case.
4. The utility of employing traditional dispute settlement mechanisms and affirming the importance of local voices is essential to peace. However, there is a need to subject these local mechanisms to critical analysis and further study, since modern development is significantly changing the social structures in conflictual societies.
5. The effectiveness of mid-level actors in the peace process might not work or apply in all settings and circumstances. The alternative approach of bottom-up peacebuilding by harnessing the potentialities of grassroots communities for peace needs further attention.

Fetherston (2000) criticises Lederach for not incorporating context-specific power analysis in the Conflict Transformation Framework. In his view, a critical discourse analysis is necessary to understanding power by looking at the ways in which institutions, structures and relationships of multi-faceted social spaces intersperse with the prevailing social and political norms. Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) warn that the practical application of the framework by INGOs might yield negative consequences because of their insufficient understanding of local realities and contexts of conflict-riven communities.

The securitisation of development (Howell 2014; Hettne 2010; Paris 2001) and peacebuilding (Newman 2011) constitutes a major explanation of the co-optation of NGOs into the neoliberal peace. With the pressing global security threats coming from conflict-ridden communities in many post-conflict states (Fisher and Anderson 2005), various international peacebuilding players have promoted the utility of the liberal peace in managing and resolving intrastate conflicts. The liberal peace is the “dominant form of peace-support intervention” (Joshi, Lee and Mac Ginty 2014, 36). Newman (2011) claims that liberal institutionalist models typically guide peacebuilding operations in post-war environments. Multilateral and bilateral agencies and IGOs are the key drivers in

domesticating international peacebuilding frameworks that are formulated based on liberal principles. These principles particularly emphasise security, rule of law, security sector reform, development, good governance and respect for human rights (Joshi et al. 2014; Richmond 2011). Cosmopolitan actors, who are driving peacebuilding operations in the global south, have a considerably naïve assumption that democratisation and integration into the global market economy are truly necessary to generate long-lasting peace in conflictual communities (Paris 1997). Liberal peace agents promote the ideological supremacy and emancipatory character of liberal peacebuilding in a way that presents it as the ultimate cure for a wide array of complex socio-political maladies, which fuel and sustain insurgency and ethnic conflicts in many divided societies. Nonetheless, there is a notable gap in the peacebuilding literature due to the scant attention of scholars to questioning the dynamics and nature of power in conflict-torn communities, which has significant impact on liberal peacebuilding operations.

2.3 | The absence of power in liberal peacebuilding

The peacebuilding literature focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of the liberal peace and it fails to pay sufficient attention to power, which is a crucial element in understanding complex realities in war-torn communities. The debate on peacebuilding is characterised by contradicting perspectives on the epistemological and ontological utility of liberal peacebuilding, namely a comprehensive approach to conflict management through democratisation (Kappler 2017). Prominent scholars like Oliver Richmond (2005; 2006; 2010), Edward Newman (2011) and Roger Mac Ginty (2010; 2011; 2014) posted critiques on the legitimacy and sustainability of the liberal peace paradigm, while Roland Paris¹ (2010) and Peter Uvin (2002) opted to defend the ideological and practical value of the said peacebuilding model. Before moving into the critical part of the peacebuilding literature, I will briefly explain the evolving and transformative nature of international peacebuilding from liberalism to neoliberalism, which does not pay significant attention to power at the grassroots. Local power is heavily emphasised in the hybrid peace literature, which suggests the emergence of post-liberalism, but is largely confined to the theoretical level.

¹ For a comprehensive discussion, see Paris, Ronald. 2010. Saving Liberal Peacebuilding. *Review of International Studies* 36: 337-365.

Liberal peacebuilding

Peacebuilding activities in volatile and conflict-prone societies have broad components and goals (see Jackson 2018). Peacebuilding actors, particularly IGOs and NGOs, devote more attention to building institutions that facilitate the democratisation and marketisation of conflict-stricken communities. For this reason, the nature of peacebuilding in contemporary times is labelled as “liberal peacebuilding” (Newman et al. 2009, 11). It derives its theoretical foundation from the liberal peace theory, which claims that liberal states tend to be more peaceful in conducting their internal and international affairs compared with illiberal states under autocratic rule (Owen 1994; Pugh 2004). The international version of the liberal peace is the democratic peace theory postulated by the neoliberalist thinker, Michael Doyle (1983, 1986, 2005). His theory is influenced by the *Perpetual Peace* essay of Immanuel Kant in 1795 (cited in Krupp 2010). Doyle claims that states with consolidated democracies have a constant inclination towards peace and do not wage war against one another. Both theories persistently assert that democratisation and marketisation will likely generate peace in war-prone polities (Newman et al. 2009; Zürcher, Manning, Evenson, Hayman, Riese and Roehner 2013). However, the proliferation of domestic and ethnic conflicts in many post-colonial states that adopted liberal democracy (see Chandler 2002; Zaum 2012) sharply contradicts Doyle’s naïve assumption that peace is intrinsic in liberalism.

These theories are conventionally applied by scholars to understand the complex linkages between democracy, war and peace in the context of interstate conflicts. The death of the Soviet Union affirms the prominence of liberal democracy and capitalism as the most successful political and economic ideologies in “a new world order” (Keohane 2012, 129). This triumphant status accorded to liberal ideology is apparently inspired by the “end of history” thesis of Francis Fukuyama (1992). Consequently, communist states, particularly former satellites of the Soviet Union, gradually transformed into democracies, although with varying degrees of success (see Dauderstädt and Gerrits 2000). The fall of communism in Europe apparently reinforced the ideological appeal of liberal norms, which cascaded globally. Nonetheless, western-style democracy in the post-Cold War era was confronted with multiple challenges, including the surge of intrastate and ethnic conflicts, particularly in the global south (Ratuva 2016).

Many post-colonial states have become the breeding ground of civil wars and internal mass violence. According to Carey (2012), states that are fledgling democracies are prone to collapse and state failure as they do not have substantial preparation for independence and they have been under corrupt regimes for decades. Groups that have experienced subordination and oppression

have the tendency to rebel and engage in armed uprisings against the state (Kinsella and Rousseau 2009). The emergence of domestic armed conflicts in failed or fragile states has become the primary focus of the international peacebuilding agenda (Paris 1997). Moreover, liberal actors see the rise of extremist and radical organisations in these regions of the world as a transnational security imperative (Carey 2012; Newman 2011). Fukuyama (2004) asserts that the security thinking of powerful western states is driven by their assumptions that weak states are the sources of threats to international security and not their rival big powers. Hence, conflict-prone communities are in a way demonised as they pose a grave threat to global security. This is a compelling argument that drives powerful states and IGOs into securitising peacebuilding in order to ensure stability and contain conflict in the global south (Newman 2011; Newman et al. 2009).

Peace and conflict scholars like Mac Ginty (2010; 2011) and Newman et al. (2009) raise criticisms against liberal peacebuilding due to its hegemonic tendency to impose western values and ideas on the global south. It is also perceived as an assertion of neo-colonialism by imperial powers in the global north, such as the European Union (see Behr 2007). With so much emphasis on maintaining stability and containing conflict, liberal peacebuilding has often failed to take into account local realities and the needs of the people who are directly affected by widespread internal violence (Newman 2011). In some circumstances, liberal rhetoric and democratic norms, which provide the basis for liberal peacebuilding, are not compatible and are often in conflict with extant beliefs and institutions in conflict-riven communities. Drawing from extensive fieldwork in Southeast Asia, Africa, South America and the Pacific, Oliver Richmond (2011) heavily criticises the liberal peace for its marginalising effects on local agencies in these conflict-marred communities. He claims,

In many post-violence environments, local perceptions of the liberal peace projects and its statebuilding focus indicate it to be ethnically bankrupt, subject to double standards, coercive, conditional, acultural and relatively unconcerned with needs, social welfare, or public services, and unfeeling and insensitive towards its subjects (4).

Such a narrative of the marginalisation of local capacities for peacemaking and peacebuilding constitutes an explanation for the resistance coming from various domestic actors on the ground, where the actual armed skirmishes are occurring (Mac Ginty 2011).

Despite criticisms, IGOs and donor agencies have had considerable success in defending the ideological utility of the liberal peace in confronting challenges posed by intrastate conflicts. They are able to present epistemological and empirical evidence that reinforces the value of liberal peacebuilding operations globally. For instance, the 2010 Human Security Report claims that the significant decline in the numbers of high-intensity domestic conflicts constitutes a major success indicator of international peacebuilding that is built upon principles of liberalism (Human Security Report Project 2010). External interventions in post-conflict communities have received recognition for successfully preventing the resurgence of intrastate wars, such as the internationally-supported peace operation in Aceh in 2005, Indonesia (see Espesor 2019; Törnquist 2011).

The superiority of liberal values and ideas in peacebuilding is due to the agency of its key drivers: the UN along with other donor agencies. They mobilise agents who belong to the epistemic or knowledge communities to gather scientific information through research that defends liberal peacebuilding operations. The liberal peacebuilding model provides the blueprint for various international actors, who claim to have peacebuilding mandates (Mac Ginty 2010). Moreover, they have the material power to incentivise influential NGOs to carry out their global project on democratisation. NGOs are also strategic players that are capable of cascading the liberal peace in war-torn communities in the global south through the process of norm diffusion (Lewis and Kanji 2009; Wallace 1997; see also Acharya 2004).

Neoliberal peacebuilding

Neoliberalism has influenced and reshaped the liberal peace paradigm, which eventually gives rise to neoliberal peacebuilding and neoliberal statebuilding (Richmond 2013). Neoliberal economics had been applied in post-conflict societies with the purpose of transforming war economies (Pugh, Cooper and Turner 2008) and integrating them into the global economy (Ahearne 2009; Turner and Pugh 2006). According to Patrick Tom (2018), the liberal peace has been co-opted by neoliberal economics, which represents neoliberal capitalism at the expense of human needs, welfare and social justice. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and multinational corporations are mobilising NGOs, not as civil society actors but as market players, to promote the idea of neoliberalism globally (Wallace 2004; Petras 1999). These international institutions are labelled by David Chandler (2002, 89) as “the liberal elites” who are disillusioned with ordinary citizens and disappointed with the politics of decision-making that leads them to give priority to the “empowered individuals” who can carry out their neoliberalist agenda. These empowered

individuals include NGOs that are engaged in a privatised mode of social service delivery. Hence, these NGOs “helped accelerate further state withdrawal from social services provision” (Harvey 2005, 177).

The neoliberal peace is an influential and prominent peacebuilding paradigm that serves as the “mantra” of powerful states and international institutions, particularly the USA, the European Union and the United Nations (Pugh et al. 2008, 2). On the first anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Centre, the *New York Times* published the statement of President George W. Bush, “Securing Freedom’s Triumph”, where he reinforced the ideational utility of neoliberal peacebuilding. In an effort to preserve the peace, the President said,

America also has an opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom and progress to nations that lack them. We seek a just peace where repression, resentment and poverty are replaced with the hope of democracy, development, free markets and free trade. More than ever, we know that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose a great danger to the peace of the world. Poverty does not transform poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, corruption and repression are a toxic combination in many societies, leading to weak governments that are unable to enforce order or patrol their borders and are vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels (Bush 2002).

This statement from Bush affirms the neoliberal character of the US towards international peacebuilding. It also implies the moral obligation of the US to promote democracy and development in conflictual societies in order to counter global threats of terrorism and extremism. Therefore, according to Kappler (2017) and Newman (2011), neoliberal peacebuilding has become a tool for securitisation.

The evolution of liberal peace to neoliberal peace does not address its inherent weaknesses and limitations, rather it stimulates strong criticisms. Prominent scholars in International Relations and Peace Studies, such as Chandler (2006), Duffield (2001; 2005), Pugh, Cooper and Turner (2008), Richmond (2005; 2006; 2010), Newman (2011) and Mac Ginty (2010; 2011; 2014) raised questions on the legitimacy and sustainability of the liberal peace paradigm. Charles Call (2012, 35) names these scholars “critical peacebuilding theorists”. These critiques led to the emergence of liberal-local hybrid or local turn in peacebuilding which suggests the evolution of neoliberal peace to post-liberal peace.

Local turn or post-liberal peacebuilding

A number of scholars have argued that international peacebuilding failed to fulfil its promise of emancipating conflict-riven societies from violent wars and transforming them into communities of peace and development (Tom 2018). Although liberal peacebuilding is the dominant and prominent peacebuilding model preferred by the international community (Espesor 2017b), the academic literature exposes many of its flaws, weaknesses and limitations. Duffield (2001), for example, sees the liberal peace is seen as an intrusive and new interventionist tool to rebuild post-conflict societies and to counter the global security threat that emerges as a consequence of state failure. The goal of liberal peace is not only to end violent conflict, but ultimately to restructure conflict-riven societies through the exportation of liberal democratic norms and values of “good governance, democratic elections, human rights, the rule of law and market relations” (Chandler 2010, 138). For advocates of the liberal peace, the key to achieve durable peace is to propagate democracy globally. According to Bellamy and Williams (2014),

liberal democratic states construct relationships built on confident expectations of peaceful change, free trade, cooperation for mutual gain and transnational relationship between societies. It also implies that where liberal societies are absent, war within and between states will be more likely. The principal aim of peace operations thus becomes not so much about creating spaces for negotiated conflict resolution between states but about actively contributing to the construction of liberal polities, economies and societies. In other words, post-Westphalian peace operations are intended to protect and spread liberal democratic governance (16).

To some degree, Duffield (2005) concurs with the idea of Bellamy and Williams; however, his approach to the liberal peace is more sceptical. He argues that this Western epistemology of peace is not designed to bring the common good, rather he calls it liberal imperialism, an instrument of colonialism. Little (2014) agrees that this peacebuilding model is perceived as a tool for hegemonic imposition of Western knowledge and values upon other cultures. Moreover, another shortcoming of liberal peacebuilding is its failure to stop violence in post-war societies. As shown in the cases of Sierra Leone (Tom 2013), Kosovo, Afghanistan (Chandler 2002), Timor-Leste and Côte d'Ivoire, violence remains a prominent feature of the post-conflict environment (Zaum 2012).

Among the critics, Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty (2015)² are the best-known scholars who question the legitimacy of the liberal peace as a universal and cosmopolitan epistemology of peace. In his book, *A Post-liberal Peace*, Richmond (2011), argues that the peacebuilding model applied in the post-Cold War environment has failed to establish a connection with its recipient communities. For Richmond, the liberal peace is a “virtual peace” that is meaningless from the point of view of its intended recipients in the global south (2006, 307). Mac Ginty’s (2010; 2011) critique of the liberal peace is focused on its tendency to impose an exogenous notion of peace premised upon Western epistemology to its target population. He also labelled international peacebuilding operations as a form of “routine peace” that is heavily dependent on technocracy and on bureaucratic imperative that facilitate the ascension of donors and NGOs into a prominent status within the peacebuilding enterprise (2012, 287). As a result, liberal peacebuilding is facing different forms of local resistance at the community level (Richmond, 2010) due to incompatibilities and incongruence with extant beliefs and institutions. Edward Newman (2011) agrees with the arguments of Richmond and Mac Ginty. He claims that most of the liberal peacebuilding operations focus mainly on maintaining stability and are insensitive to local needs and desires. Hence, Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013, 763) stress the need for scholars to devote attention on the subaltern dimension of peace—a phenomenon that is referred to as the “local” or “cultural turn” (Bräuchler and Naucke 2017, 422) in peace operations.

The critiques and critical assessments of the liberal peace led to the emergence of the idea of a hybrid notion of peace formation, which suggests the emergence of post-liberal peace (Richmond 2011). The post-liberal peace is claimed by Richmond (2009; 2010) to be emancipatory in that it promises sustainable peace that goes beyond hierarchical structures and power relations that are evident in liberal peacebuilding.

It is clear that local power structures have not received sufficient attention in the peacebuilding literature, which is heavily focused on the successes and failures of the liberal peace. However, the local turn in peacebuilding promises emancipation for the liberal peace from ethical crisis. The local or cultural turn in peacebuilding puts emphasis on the key potentialities of local power and extant beliefs and institutions in the production of legitimate and sustainable peace in conflictual societies. Nonetheless, the suggested alternative of having a liberal-local hybrid in peacebuilding is currently focused on at the scholarly and theoretical level and is deemed insufficient to come up

² For a comprehensive discussion on the critique of the liberal peace, see Richmond, Oliver and Roger Mac Ginty. 2015. Where now for the Critique of the Liberal Peace?, *Cooperation and Conflict* 50 (2): 171-198.

with an objective assessment as to the ideological and practical utility of hybrid peace formation. Paffenholz (2015) suggests paying attention to the geographies of power or resistance in order to have a critical understanding of the local turn in peacebuilding. She expresses the possibility of romanticising hybrid peace governance by NGOs and other peacebuilding actors. Without a clear knowledge of power, Hoehne (2013, 199) warned about the so-called “crippled hybrid,” where extant institutions and local forces might weaken formal democratic apparatus and violate a state’s authority and legitimacy. Moreover, A more recent empirical study by Simangan (2018, 3) on hybridity in peacebuilding in Cambodia illustrates the production of “negative hybrid peace” that is neither liberal nor emancipatory.

2.4 | Nature and geographies of power

The survey of peacebuilding literature calls for further understanding of the nature and geographies of power in order to develop an objective investigation of hybrid peacebuilding in conflictual societies. The failure of proponents of the liberal peace to incorporate context-specific power analysis excites criticisms and academic controversies among scholars at the theoretical level. Nonetheless, there is insufficient empirical research that has been conducted to develop in-depth understanding about the impacts of local power and politics on liberal peacebuilding when it is transported, diffused and hybridised by its agents in communities marred with violent conflict.

In his effort to defend the ideational and practical utility of liberal peacebuilding, Paris (1997) acknowledges the fundamental flaws in its design and calls for open discussions and debates to reform the liberal peace paradigm without the need to replace it or “move beyond liberal peacebuilding” (2010, 362). He appeals to scholars to continually interrogate the liberal peace, using a variety of approaches and methodologies. Moreover, Paffenholz (2015) presents a research agenda that stresses the need to conduct ethnographic, empirically-grounded and participatory forms of research to have a holistic understanding of the local turn in peacebuilding.

Understanding a complex political regime in conflictual societies requires a thorough analysis of power. Hence, a power mapping exercise is useful to identify the roles of different actors and their powers, networks and relationships. The utility of power mapping as a research approach lies in its ability to reveal and expose the nodes and intensities of power in a participatory manner. At the theoretical level, Fetherston (2000) and Paffenholz (2009) put forward the need to include power analysis to enhance the conflict transformation framework of Lederach (1997). The peacebuilding literature suggests that very few scholars critically scrutinise power when investigating the complex

and dynamic nature of peacebuilding, particularly in the context of societies under complex political order. Ngin and Verkoren (2015) employed stakeholders analysis to identify the networks, relationships and powers of actors who are involved in land conflicts in Cambodia. Although this ethnographic and empirical study of Ngin and Verkoren is limited to land disputes, it is a useful contribution to the existing body of literature that pays attention to power, particularly at the community level.

According to Ngin and Verkoren (2015, 26), in an insecure environment under a complex regime, multiple and “interlocking networks of power meet”. In other words, there is a cohabitation and overlapping of formal/liberal/legitimate/transformative and informal/illiberal/illegitimate/coercive forms of power, where the boundary or demarcation is difficult to locate and identify. The survey of the literature reveals that power is a highly contested and nebulous concept (see Lukes 2004). Its nature is either transformative or coercive (Dudouet 2014). It manifests itself in closed, invited and claimed or created spaces. Some powers have obvious referents or manifestations, while others are hidden or invisible (Gaventa 2006; Cornwall 2004). For Max Weber (1978), power is all about domination and subordination. Dominant actors employ control and coercion to impose their will, while subordinated groups may exercise power collectively such as in rebellion as an expression of resistance. He also posited that power is legitimate provided it is exercised in the form of legal, traditional and charismatic authorities (Weber 1947).

Post-structuralist scholars, particularly Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, provide significant conceptual insights to understand the nature and geographies of power. Foucault (1991) advances ideas about the subtle operation of power. It is pervasive and capable of generating knowledge and discourses that are ubiquitous. In other words, power from a Foucauldian perspective is not contained or concentrated in one location; rather it is diffused and present everywhere. Power is also capable of penetrating men’s behaviour (Foucault, 2008). Hence, even subordinated and less powerful actors have the agency to exercise power, perhaps through violent resistance to counter oppression and domination. For Bourdieu (1977), the construction of power is determined by the interplay of formal and informal rules, interlocking networks of actors and their access to resources. Both thinkers sensitise us to the claim that there are forms of knowledge that are deemed superior or hegemonic because they are dictated by powerful actors. Hence, the superiority of knowledge is contingent on the amount of power of its proponents or agents. The

liberal peace is a powerful epistemology because it is promoted by the powerful states and IGOs in the world stage.

The superior ideational power of the liberal peace has major implications in the local turn that is characterised by hybridity of liberal and local epistemologies of peace. Donais and Burt (2015, 3) refer to hybridity as “vertical integration” of exogenous and endogenous mechanisms of peacebuilding. I will discuss in the next section this theoretical notion of hybridity and hybridisation as an attempt of critical peacebuilding theorists to illuminate local power and extant beliefs and institutions in contemporary peace operations, which are apparently downplayed or even absent in liberal and neoliberal peacebuilding.

2.5 | Hybridity in peacebuilding

Prominent scholars in IR and Peace Studies have not merely debunked the theory and practice of liberal peacebuilding: they have also offered alternatives that fall under the nebulous and loosely-defined rubric of hybridity. What is central to most notions of hybrid peace is local ownership and ‘everyday’ and subaltern agency (Schwarz 2005; Newman et al. 2009; Mac Ginty 2014). It is claimed by Richmond (2010) that this hybrid peace offers emancipation to the overly stressed liberal peace as it is aptly suited to generate consent and legitimacy to externally supported peacebuilding operations. Therefore, hybrid forms of peace consequently facilitate the hybridisation of legitimacy in fragile post-war environments (Boege 2014; Schwoebel 2018).

Hybridity in theoretical terms

Hybridity has emerged as a popular theoretical and conceptual framework in peacebuilding that is developed and propounded by prominent academics i.e., Oliver Richmond, Roger Mac Ginty, Roberto Belloni and Volker Boege, who are prolific in producing scholarly publications on the hybrid notion of peace. Nonetheless, a survey of the literature suggests multiple and varied conceptualisations and contextualisations of hybridity in peacebuilding.

Mac Ginty (2010) and Richmond (2011) conceptualise hybridity as a theoretical lens to investigate the complex process of peace formation that is characterised by a liberal-local interface. The liberal-local hybrid is a product of the interaction, mixture and distortion of exogenous and endogenous forces (Mac Ginty 2010). This hybrid peace, according to the theory of Richmond (2013), promises potential for emancipation, where the desires, identities, needs and interests of

state and non-state peacebuilding players are respected and taken into consideration. Richmond also reveals the asymmetric power relations between the international and local. Although the field is uneven for the liberal peace and local infrastructures of peace in hybrid peace formation, it is necessary to generate local and international legitimacy. This means hybrid peace is a precondition to the attainment of hybrid forms of legitimacy: a balance of exogenous and endogenous forms that guarantee “mutual accommodation and social justice, with respect for human rights and democracy” (Richmond 2013, 274).

Hybridity is not only applied to understand top-down and bottom-up interaction of local and liberal versions of peace. It is also a conceptual tool employed by critical peacebuilding theorists like Duffield (2001) and Newman (2011) to explain the development-security nexus. The creation of “strategic complexes of the liberal peace” (Duffield 2001, 13) in the post-Cold War environment facilitates the emergence of global governance and new wars. Non-state actors, particularly NGOs, have earned greater involvement in the merging of development and peacebuilding agendas. In Newman’s view, weak and underdeveloped states are perceived as a source of threat to global security. For this reason, international organisations and donors see the need for the securitisation of peacebuilding (Newman 2011). Likewise according to Kappler (2017), securitisation is important to justify the epistemological relevance and practical utility; hence, a survival mechanism for the liberal peace.

Hybrid violence and hybrid peace governance

Another group of scholars conceptualised hybridity as a regime that focuses on the actors and their powers in conflictual societies in so-called fragile states. For Boege, Brown and Clements (2009, 13) the labels ‘fragile’ or ‘weak’ states are a misnomer. Instead, they described the politico-security in conflict-torn communities as “hybrid political order,” where local knowledge, traditional authorities and informal institutions determine the everyday social reality of the people in conflictual communities. With reference to communities in the South Pacific, Clements, Boege, Brown, Foley and Nolan (2007) argue that hybrid political order characterises the process of statebuilding. According to them, the complex fusion of traditional and modern cultures is a prominent feature of political regimes in Melanesia and Polynesia.

In conceptualising complex political regimes, Belloni (2012) came up with comprehensive typologies or categorisations of institutional hybridity. The three types of complex regimes involve the following conditions:

- Formal institutions of democracy are heavily influenced by informalities and normative values and principles that are deemed illiberal in character, such as clientelism, patronage, corruption and illicit economy.
- Apparatus of the state accords official recognition to informal institutions and practices such as the employment of indigenous structures in conflict resolution.
- Liberal state institutions are dominated and captured by coercive state actors and institutions that include rebel commanders and warlords (Belloni 2012).

In the view of Helmke and Levitsky (2004), the recognition of informal institutions and illiberal actors in complex security environments in a post-Cold War setting resulted in the production of different varieties of regimes — a phenomenon of “competitive authoritarianism.” Complex regimes are often described as flawed or transitional democracies, “semi-democracy, semi-authoritarianism, pseudo-democracy, illiberal democracy and partly free” societies (Levitsky and Way 2002, 51-52).

Krause (2012, 40) contributes to the discussion on hybridity by contextualising “hybrid violence.” In a post-conflict scenario, the attempts of the state to have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force often come into tension with hybridised forms of violence that existed prior to the eruption of conflict. In his view, hybrid violence plays a critical role in the configuration of conflict in many conflictual societies (Krause 2012).

Due to the inherent nature of hybrid violence in communities under complex political order, Belloni (2012, 22) conceptualised hybridity as an approach to conflict management. He propounded the concept of “hybrid peace governance” that refers to a range of activities and strategies that can be employed in managing hybridised forms of violence in complex regimes. Using the case of Georgia, Mac Ginty (2013) affirms the relevance of hybrid governance as a conflict prevention tool in a complex political order.

Everyday peace

According to Belloni (2012), the hybridisation of the liberal peace with local practices in conflict-ridden communities suggests the progression of the liberal peace paradigm to post-liberalism. Hybridity is the reflection of liberal peacebuilding. To withstand strong criticism and for the liberal peace to survive, Mac Ginty (2011) proposed that it should not rely on the use of top-down power. The key to its survival is to go through hybridisation with subaltern agencies in the conflictual

polities where it is applied. In the norm localisation literature, hybridisation is similarly referred to by Amitav Acharya (2004) as adaptation that involves pruning and grafting of foreign norms to make them compatible with extant beliefs and institutions. According to Mac Ginty, the production of hybrid or composite forms of peace is due to the interplay of the following variables:

the compliance powers of the liberal peace; the incentive powers of the liberal peace; the ability of local actors to resist, ignore or subvert the liberal peace; and the ability of local actors to formulate and maintain alternatives to the liberal peace (Mac Ginty 2010, 398).

Clearly, Mac Ginty is acknowledging the primary importance of local, indigenous and subaltern forces that shape everyday reality in war-ridden communities in hybridising the liberal peace. Hybridisation, according to Richmond (2013, 274), is a “slow and arduous movement beyond the liberal peace toward a post-liberal peace.” By emphasising the importance of the liberal-local hybrid as an indicator of post-liberalism, Richmond does not intend to suggest the death of the liberal peace. Rather, by “foregrounding the everyday,” he seeks to rescue and save the liberal peace from its ethical dilemma through the establishment of a connection with its subjects (2010, 669). Richmond (2009, 569) used the term “*eirenist*” to encourage scholarship that ethically re-evaluates the theoretical and practical aspects of the liberal peace. Arguably, the post-liberal peace suggests the latest design of the “infrapolitics of peacebuilding” (Richmond 2010, 689).

It is clear that local power and practices are central to the notions of hybrid peace, a local or cultural turn, and everyday peace, which all fall within the theoretical rubric of hybridity and hybridisation. Nonetheless, the inclusion of local power in this emerging political infrastructure of peacebuilding as suggested by Richmond (2010) is locked in the theoretical realm. It is apparent in the survey of peacebuilding literature that very few empirical studies have been conducted that seek to understand the phenomenon of power and hybrid peace formation in conflictual societies (see Simangan 2018; Ngin and Verkoren 2015).

To address this gap in the peacebuilding literature, I intend to investigate the interface of liberal peacebuilding and local power in the context of Mindanao, which is currently marred by protracted domestic armed conflict. Mindanao is an interesting case due to the complexities of power on the ground. The Asia Foundation described the Mindanao conflict as one that is “complex, multi-layered and defies simple explanation” (Adriano and Parks 2013, xi). In the next section, I will

look at the current state of research to establish the claim that no research has been carried out to analyse power that has significant implication on NGOs in the securitisation and hybridisation of peacebuilding in the southern Philippines.

2.6 | Current state of research in Mindanao

The purpose of taking stock of academic publications related to the peace process in the southern Philippines is to come up with a justification of why I have chosen Mindanao as the case for this research project. A survey of the studies and research on Mindanao reveals that scholars have not paid attention to investigating power in relations to the complex role of NGOs in peacebuilding operations in the southern Philippines. I have limited the review to articles and other scholarly publications related to the Mindanao peace process from 2012 to 2018. The beginning date is 2012 because that was the year when the Philippine government and the MILF signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB). The literature on Mindanao can be categorised into six issues: modern history of the Mindanao conflict, gender as it relates to grassroots peacebuilding efforts; donors' role in the peace process; violent extremism and rebel governance; Mindanao's illicit economy; policy recommendations to improve the peace process; and hybrid peace formation in Mindanao.

Some scholars on the Mindanao peace process focused on the present history of the conflict (Abinales 2016; Curaming 2017; Montiel, Rodil and de Guzman 2012), gender issues (Hall and Hoare 2015; Cagoco-Guiam 2013; Davies, True and Tanyag 2016; Beza Johnson and Fuentes 2018) and community-based mechanisms for peacebuilding (Zaros 2015; Adam and Verbrugge 2014; Bau 2017). Some recent studies look at the involvement of donors and international organisations in the peace process in Mindanao. For instance, Ochiai (2016) and Ishikawa (2014) investigated the contributions of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in fostering peace and development in Mindanao. Ozerdem (2012) examined the role and influence of the Organisation of Islamic Countries in the peace process in the southern Philippines. The role of donor institutions and the impact of foreign aid on war-torn Mindanao was extensively examined in the study of Adriano and Parks (2013), *The Contested Corners of Asia: Subnational Conflict and International Development Assistance*, published by The Asia Foundation (TAF). These studies are deliberately designed to inform donors' policies or even to affirm the legitimacy and boost the popularity of donor agencies like JICA and TAF.

Some recent studies on Mindanao have centred on the phenomenon of violent extremism and rebel governance. For instance, South and Joll (2016) and Abuza (2014) explained the process of transformation of the MILF from a revolutionary organisation into a democratic political institution through the establishment of the United Bangsamoro Justice Party. Quimpo (2016) argued that jihadism had infiltrated the Moro nationalist groups in Mindanao even before the 9/11 attacks and warned of the possible rise of groups that are affiliated to the Islamic State, particularly the Abu Sayyaf and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM) (Franco, 2016). Hence, in the latest publication of Loesch (2017), she wrote that the current peace process should be designed for the prevention and transformation of violent extremism in Mindanao.

Aside from the 'burning' issue of radicalism and violent extremism, academics have also conducted critical investigations into the existence and rampant proliferation of an illicit or shadow economy in Mindanao. The book, *Out of the Shadows: Violent Conflict and the Real Economy of Mindanao*, edited by Lara and Schoofs (2013), exposed the existence of a lucrative black market in Mindanao because of the inability of the Philippine government to enforce the rule of law in this war-torn region of the country. This book contains controversial and potentially destructive ethnographic studies of the illegal drug trade (Cagoco-Guiam and Schoofs 2013), the kidnap-for-ransom business (Gutierrez 2013), the illicit gun trade (Quitoriano 2013) and the cross-border smuggling of goods (Villanueva 2013). Although this book does not include NGOs and their possible involvement in illegal activities, it is useful to reveal the vibrant shadow economy that thrives and cohabits with violent conflict in Mindanao.

The current research on the Mindanao peace process has the objective of putting forward policy recommendations. Franco (2017) encouraged President Duterte to take advantage of his political capital to preserve the strategic partnership with the MILF in fostering peace in Mindanao. He also suggested that the president should avoid dealing with the MNLF Nur Misuari faction and treat IS-inspired extremist groups such as Abu Sayyaf and Maute Groups as criminal syndicates to prevent them from acquiring legitimacy. In addition, Buendia (2017) espoused an inclusive governance in Mindanao that is sensitive to the needs and legitimate grievances of different ethnic groups in the conflict zone. Finally, the book, *Mindanao: The Long Journey to Peace and Prosperity*, edited by Paul Hutchcroft (2016) is a comprehensive volume that includes articles written by prominent scholars such as Steven Rood, Patricio Abinales, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer and Francisco Lara. Nonetheless, this book does not pay specific attention to the roles and functions of NGOs, despite their prominence, as liberal peace agents and power brokers in conflict-ridden Mindanao.

The latest studies relating to hybrid peacebuilding in Mindanao are primarily focused on the delivery of justice and security. Deinla's (2018) research is heavily premised on legal perspectives and focused on the hybrid legal mechanisms that are utilised to promote stability, prevent escalation of low- intensity conflict into full-blown war, and achieve sustainable justice in the ARMM. Most of the evidence that is used to back up the argument in this study is based on secondary data. For instance, the issue on *rido* or war clan is comprehensively discussed in this study as the "force behind the dynamic hybridisation of the justice architecture" in the Bangsamoro (Deinla 2018, 225). Nonetheless, understanding hybrid legal apparatus in resolving *rido* only deals with one aspect of hybrid peace formation in Mindanao. Moreover, Adam (2018) investigates the complexity in the merging of formal and informal institutions in the provision of justice and security in the two provinces of Lanao in the southern Philippines. He argues that the transfer of power from customary leaders to elected politicians in resolving disputes has reinforced local authoritarianism in the conflict zone. His research is important to understand the complex phenomenon of institutional hybridity; however, it only captures one type of power.

2.7 | Concluding thoughts and implications of local power among NGOs

The literature review reveals that the major weakness in the development and peacebuilding literatures is the failure of scholars to devote significant attention to power on the ground, which led to insufficient and partial understanding of the successes and failures of liberal peacebuilding in many conflictual societies. The failure of scholars to fully engage and scrutinise power has major implications in understanding the roles and functions of actors who are involved in peace operations, especially NGOs. The field of Development Studies focuses on the phenomena of politicisation and depoliticisation of NGOs as democratisation agents and major market players pursuant to the neoliberal agenda of development. On the other hand, the peacebuilding literature highlights the role of NGOs as agents of the liberal peace that are eventually co-opted or absorbed into neoliberal peacekeeping and peacebuilding due to their capacity to engage in a privatised mode of peace operations in conflict-torn communities.

The main critique raised against liberal and neoliberal peacebuilding is its tendency towards hegemonic imposition of the Western epistemology of peace and its downplaying or undermining of the critical element of local power and politics in war-riven communities. The local turn in peacebuilding, which is characterised by hybrid peace formation provides paramount importance to local power and extant beliefs and institutions. However, the academic attention devoted to

power on the ground is currently confined to the theoretical level and requires further elucidation through the conduct of ethnographic, empirical and participatory forms of research, which seek to interrogate the dynamic interface of exogenous and endogenous forces. Empirical investigations are useful to expose the tensions, dilemmas and contradictions that are produced when the liberal peace interacts with local power and politics.

In this study, I argue that it is imperative to pay attention to the nature and geographies of power in the conflict zone because it has major implications for the peacebuilding operation of NGOs and donors, as well as for the lives of conflict-stricken civilians in the southern Philippines. NGOs are commissioned and entrusted by donors and IGOs to facilitate democratisation through hybrid peace governance in contested political environments. The critical scrutiny of power in conflictual societies is necessary to come up with realistic expectations of the contributions of NGOs to peacebuilding, particularly through conflict transformation. Context-specific power analysis is useful to understand the potentialities and challenges confronting NGOs in their efforts to facilitate power transformation through diffusion of liberal-democratic norms. Moreover, the mapping of nodes and intensities of local power is important to devise mechanisms for NGOs to penetrate closed spaces, to maximise their participation in invited spaces, and to facilitate the emergence of created or claimed spaces for less powerful and marginalised actors in the conflict zone. Finally, understanding the complexities of power on the ground has implications for the everyday challenges faced by ordinary people in the conflict zone. A power mapping exercise is useful to uncover power asymmetries between the local strongmen, with multiple sources of power, and the less powerful actors on the ground.

This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by addressing the deficiency outlined above in the development and peacebuilding literatures. The main contribution of this thesis is the detailed study of Mindanao, which is a war-torn and complex political community. The case study is designed to critically interrogate the complex and perilous roles of NGOs as power brokers who simultaneously deal with liberal and illiberal gatekeepers of power – both formal and informal, and transformative and coercive – in the conflict zone. It is the contention of this thesis that peacebuilding NGOs are key agents in securitising and hybridising the liberal peace, while deeply engaged in localising liberal-democratic values and practices through a process of norm diffusion, as demonstrated in the review of the latest studies related to the peace operation in the southern Philippines, which pay scant attention to NGOs. The case study of Mindanao is useful to understand the nature and geographies of power that has major impacts on the intricate

roles that NGOs play in the complicated and transformative character of the neoliberal project. Therefore, this thesis endeavours to contribute to the current debates on the nebulous concept of power and the utility of liberal peacebuilding in democratising war-torn polities.

Finally, another contribution of this research is the use of critical ethnography and ethnology, including participatory forms of research strategies, which are aptly suited methodologies to understand the tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes that are generated through the interface of external liberal epistemology of peace and local forces and subaltern agencies within the corridors of power in conflict-riven Mindanao. The methodological design and the preference towards the ethnographic approach of this research is thoroughly discussed in Chapter Three.

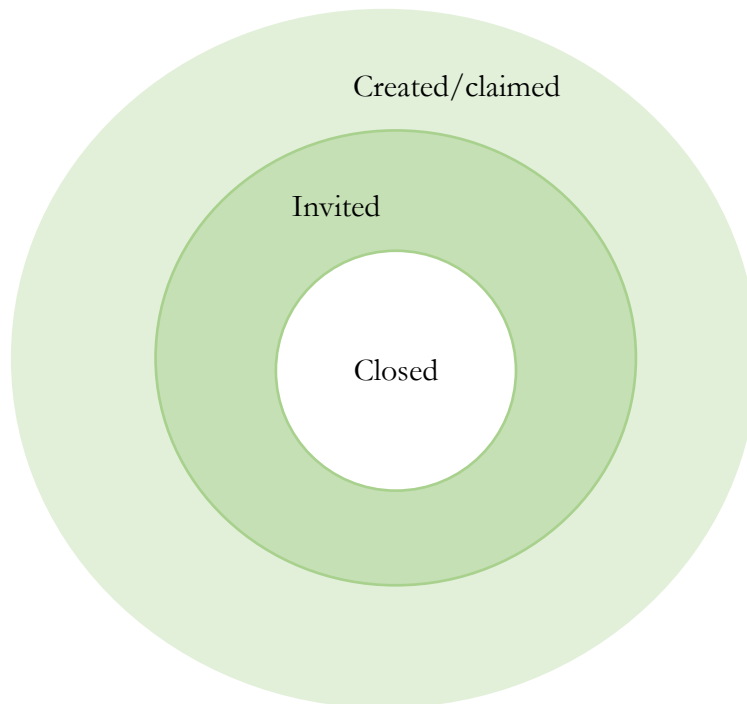
2.8 | Theorising hybridity and hybrid peace governance in the context of intrastate war

The theoretical framework of the thesis explains the rationale for why I chose NGOs as the main subject of the study and the approach I employed in the analysis of the findings. The theoretical paradigm provides justification for the study that seeks to investigate the impacts of local power on the liberal peacebuilding of NGOs and donors in Mindanao. As shown in the literature survey, peacebuilding scholars have different conceptualisations and offered varied definitions of hybridity and hybridisation. To lessen the confusion, the term hybridity refers to the primary theoretical lens employed in this thesis in order to investigate the dynamic interface of exogenous and endogenous forms of peace, while hybridisation means the process of grafting of the exogenous liberal peace into endogenous normative structures, practices and institutions in the conflict zone. Moreover, there is a deficiency in the development and peacebuilding literature, where scholars fail to critically analyse power and examine NGOs as power brokers while they engage in liberal peacebuilding operations in war-torn polities.

I employ a pragmatic theoretical approach to investigate power and the precarious function of NGOs in hybrid peace governance in war-torn Mindanao. This is an interdisciplinary research project that uses a combination of theoretical and conceptual paradigms from the fields of Development Studies and Peace Studies to understand the nature and geographies of power in peacebuilding. Power is an “essentially contested” (Lukes 2004, 14) concept, but central to enable understanding of complex social realities. The concept of power, from a Foucauldian perspective, is ubiquitous (Foucault, 1991) and difficult to “make sense of within the social sciences” (Haugaard and Clegg 2009, 2).

Spaces of power

Figure 1. Simple illustration of power spaces



Source: Author's diagram based on the writing of Cornwall (2002; 2004) and Gaventa (2006)

The scholarship on the spaces of power contributed by Andrea Cornwall (2002; 2004) and John Gaventa (2006) of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) provides a useful analytic tool to establish and analyse the geographies of power in Bangsamoro. According to these scholars, power can be found in “closed,” “invited” and “claimed or created” spaces (Gaventa 2006, 26-27), as shown in Figure 1. Ideally, development actors aim to pay significant attention to spaces that allow participation of a greater number of people in public affairs. Nonetheless, there are many spaces that are closed (inner circle) to public engagement, and only a few of the elite (e.g., elected leaders and government administrators) are given the exclusive prerogative to participate in the formulation of key decisions. The notion of participatory governance is becoming popular in many democratic societies, where non-state actors such as those in a civil society are encouraged to deliberate and engage with politicians and bureaucrats in invited spaces (middle circle) in what Cornwall (2004, 2) called “transient consultative events.” Finally, less powerful people have the agency to claim and create spaces of power that are not within the formal apparatus of the state or that are outside the domain of public policy. In the writing of Cornwall (2002), created or claimed spaces (outer circle) are organic in society and they enable people to develop a

Habermasian notion of a public sphere that is autonomous and separate from the state (Cornwall 2002; 2004; Gaventa 2006).

In this study, I will look at how peacebuilding NGOs engage with different sets of actors who hold power across these three spaces in the conflict zone in Mindanao. It is important to investigate the hybrid peace governance mechanisms of NGOs in dealing with power brokers, to assess their agency for conflict transformation, particularly in facilitating the inclusion of excluded groups in conflictual societies under a regime of complex political order. The concept of complex political regimes in the conflict zone is discussed in the next section.

Hybrid peace governance in complex regimes

Figure 2. Peace governance in complex regimes architecture

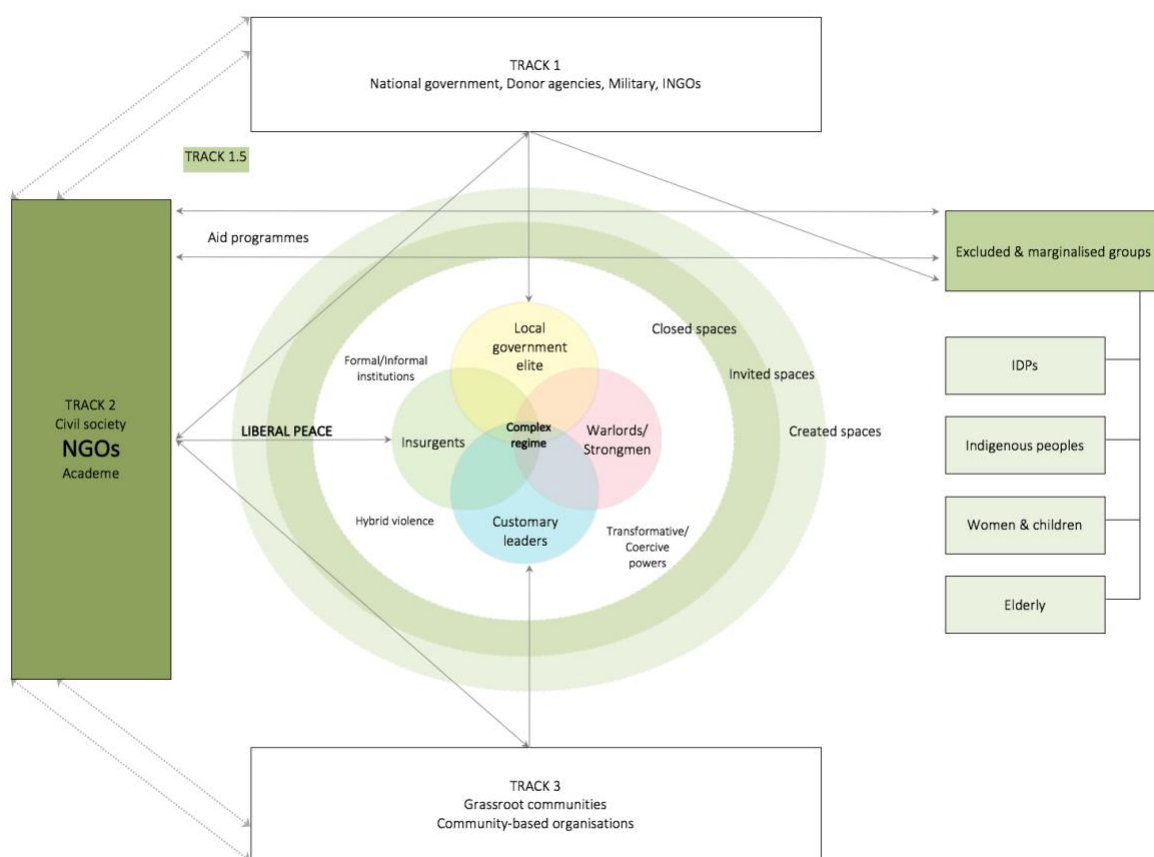


Figure 2 illustrates the Peace Governance in Complex Regimes Architecture, which constitutes a comprehensive conceptual model for the entire thesis. It includes key concepts and variables that are used in the analysis of the findings as well as in identifying some limitations of the study. It

seeks to come up with a pragmatic and integrated model to assess the impacts of local power on liberal peacebuilding operations. It is based on scholarship in the peacebuilding and development literatures, combining ideas from the fields of development (e.g., Cornwall 2002; 2004; Gaventa 2006) and peacebuilding (e.g., Lederach 1997; Mac Ginty 2010; Belloni 2012), including from critical theory (e.g., Weber 1947; Foucault 1991).

The schematic diagram reveals the positional characterisation of different actors and institutions that play vital roles in international peacebuilding operations in conflictual societies. NGOs (see green box on the left side of the diagram) are depicted as intermediary actors in the process of peacebuilding based on the multi-track diplomacy model of Diamond and McDonald (1996) from the Complementary School and they are also emphasised in the Conflict Transformation model of John Paul Lederach (1997). Lederach's model is the leading and most popular paradigm in contemporary conflict resolution (see Fetherston 2000; Paffenholz 2009; Sheehan 2014). Moreover, the inclusion of various sets of actors in different tracks of peacebuilding is inspired by the *Agenda for Peace* of the United Nations (Boutros-Ghali 1992), which is the most vigorous international organisation when it comes to the global promotion of the liberal peace. Each component and important concept of the diagram will be explained in the succeeding sections.

Complex regimes

The categories of institutional hybridity propounded by Belloni (2012) are aptly suited to be used when analysing the existence of a complex regime in conflict-ridden Mindanao (see earlier section on hybrid violence and hybrid peace governance). As shown in Figure 2 (see overlapping circles in the middle of the diagram), the conflict zone in the southern Philippines is a site of power of different types of power brokers and gatekeepers. The major participants in the power game in Mindanao are local government elite who are also warlords, strongmen or kingpins, and sometimes customary rulers such as *datu* and *sultan*, or rebel commanders. In most cases, these power brokers have multiple identities and their powers are fungible and come from different sources, including the illicit economy (Lara and Schoofs 2013). The Weberian prescription of categories of power – legal, traditional and charismatic (Weber 1947) is insufficient to contextualise the power of local strongmen in Mindanao. For instance, a local politician is also a warlord who owns a private militia and holds a royal title as a customary leader. Hence, in this thesis I have labelled them local strongmen with multiple sources of power. Local authoritarianism exists in the southern Philippines, despite the overarching national democracy in the country.

Paradoxically, these illiberal and coercive local strongmen are the controllers of liberal and formal institutions in Mindanao. Their innovative means of manufacturing consent and legitimacy is remarkable. They legitimise their rule by harnessing both formal and informal powers. Loyal supporters are rewarded with material benefits such as the provision of funds for Muslims joining the pilgrimage to Mecca. On the other hand, enemies who are threats to local strongmen's powers and interests are controversially eliminated using the power of violence and coercion. Moreover, these local strongmen are the usual sponsors or drivers of "hybrid violence" (Krause 2012, 40) due to their capacity to generate horizontal forms of violence, particularly *rido* or clan wars and inter-ethnic disputes³ (see Torres 2007). In short, the driver of the security issue in Mindanao is insurgency and separatism waged by Moro nationalist groups like the MNLF and MILF, who cause vertical forms of violence. The existence of horizontal conflict between feuding families is also a major security threat in Mindanao, which sometimes transforms into vertical conflict when the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) intervene in the dispute.

Some localities in the southern Philippines are not under the dominion of local strongmen; rather these are bailiwicks of the belligerent groups. The MILF, for instance, act as the *de facto* government in communities and territories under its control. The people living in MILF-administered camps and communities are more loyal to the armed group than they are to their duly-elected public officials. Poor governance resulting from the existence of absentee government in most conflict-prone municipalities in Mindanao is favourable for the legitimation of the MILF regime (Espesor 2017a). The Philippine national government is also unable to impose the rule of law continuously in communities marred by armed conflict in Mindanao. The presence and authority of the MILF is felt more by civilians than by warlord politicians who do not permanently reside in the conflict zone. Moreover, some rebel commanders can be considered local leaders too. They are not mere combatants: they are highly respected personalities as *ulama* or Islamic leaders and *ustadz* or religious teachers in their respective communities. Some of them have been educated in Islamic universities in the Middle East.

³ For a comprehensive discussion on *rido*, see Torres, Wilfredo. 2007 (eds). *Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao*. Manila: The Asia Foundation.

NGOs in multi-stakeholder peacebuilding

The participation of actors in multi-stakeholder peacebuilding operations is heavily influenced by the democratic peace thesis (Doyle 1983; 1986; 2005), which posits that peace is intrinsic in liberalism (Richmond 2013). The inclusion and participation of non-state actors, especially NGOs, in the production of peace in fragile regions of the global south is a new form of the interventionist policy of powerful liberal states and international institutions. This interventionist agenda was revealed when the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty issued the document *The Responsibility to Protect* (RtoP) in 2001. This document gives primacy to humanitarian action over military intervention in the management and resolution of conflicts. Hence, the document acknowledges the utility of civilian power in resolving violent conflicts. The non-military focus, particularly the provision of humanitarian aid in war-prone communities, is claimed to be a legitimate form of intervention. Moreover, the RtoP is designed to reform the international security framework to make it more responsive and sensitive to human security issues and increase the guarantee of human rights (Chandler 2004).

To emphasise civilian forces in multi-track peacebuilding operations, NGOs are mobilised to constitute the channels for track two actors that link top-level track one actors (who are composed of national governments, donors, armed forces, and INGOs)⁴ with track three grassroots actors, where violent armed skirmishes are taking place. The roles assigned to NGOs are involvement in problem-solving workshops, participation in peace commissions and building local capacities for peace. NGOs are thus in a strategic position to diffuse liberal-democratic values and principles and reinforce the normative power of the liberal peace in the conflict zone.

Lederach's Conflict Transformation Framework prescribes the synchronisation of efforts of different peacebuilding actors from top to bottom (1997). Mid-level or track two actors, particularly NGOs, are given primary importance as peace constituents owing to their potentiality for promoting peace and supporting initiatives for reconciliation, which has become the focus of the 4th generation approach to peacebuilding⁵ (Richmond 2002). The empowerment of mid-level

⁴ Some theorists and scholars in the Peace Studies classify INGOs as track 1 ½ as they have a dual role in multi-track diplomacy (see Carey 2012). Examples of these track 1 ½ INGOs are the Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and Conciliation Resources, which are part of the International Contact Group, an important pillar in the Mindanao peace process infrastructure. Both INGOs are simultaneously dealing with top-level actors as representatives of civil society and engaging with people at the grassroots affected by armed conflict.

⁵ For a detailed account of generations of peacebuilding see Richmond, Oliver. 2002. *Maintaining Order, Making Peace*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

actors is a necessary precondition not only in preventing direct violence or negative peace, but also in addressing structural inequalities to foster positive peace. It is also assumed that NGOs, as track two actors, are likely to influence peacebuilding efforts at both the macro and grassroots levels because of their ability to connect track one and three actors. They also work to influence government and donor policies at international and national levels. At the grassroots, they have direct engagement with people affected by armed conflicts (Paffenholz and Spurk 2006). Despite the positive characterisation of NGOs and their key potentiality in multi-stakeholder operations, they are subject to local power forces that are evident in conflictual societies. The need to incorporate context-specific analysis of power in conflict-torn communities is a glaring weakness of the conflict transformation paradigm (Fetherston 2000). For NGOs to transform conflict, it is imperative that they have an understanding of the intricacies of violence and dynamics of power that characterise the politico-security regime in war-torn and hybrid polities. In the next section, I will conceptualise the notion of a complex regime in the context of intrastate conflict in Mindanao.

Exclusion and marginalisation

Protracted and intractable armed conflict is interrelated with the phenomena of marginalisation and exclusion. Exclusion and deprivation are drivers of political violence (Eckstein 1980) as they facilitate discontent, anger and aggression (Gurr 1968), while marginalisation is exacerbated by violent armed conflict. Exclusion is a clear consequence of the longstanding armed conflict in the southern Philippines. Horizontal and vertical forms of violence that characterised the armed conflict in Mindanao have resulted in extreme deprivation of material benefits and violations of the social rights of the conflict-stricken population.

The civilians in the conflict zone are not only denied access to basic social services, particularly health and education, but they have also suffered from constant displacement and hostilities brought about by a series of armed skirmishes between warring groups. However, the outbreak of war is not the only driver of deprivation. Conflict-stricken civilians are deprived of justice, security and representation, as social institutions, especially government agencies, are not reliably functional during periods of complex emergencies, particularly armed hostilities. Therefore, the protracted armed conflict in the southern Philippines is a primary stumbling block for those who wish to get away from the economic, social and political trappings of inequality, which are linked to exclusion. Decades of armed hostilities have consequently facilitated permanent exclusion, which forces people to live in the margins and in abject poverty. War is a force that creates and recreates exclusion due to the inherent weakness of state institutions in conflict societies.

The survey of studies related to peace operations in Mindanao reveals the groups in the conflict zone who are the most vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation (see Cagoco-Guiam 2013; Davies et al. 2016). These groups are the internally displaced persons (IDPs), women and children, indigenous peoples and the elderly. I am aware that former combatants and child soldiers are also subject to exclusion and deprivation in Mindanao. However, for security reasons I decided not to extend my enquiries into these extremely vulnerable population groups. Moreover, the MILF and the AFP are hesitant to share confidential information about decommissioned combatants and child soldiers, so as to avoid complications in the current peace process.

In this study, I contend that the extensive exclusion and marginalisation of some groups provides legitimacy for the participation of NGOs who claim to alleviate suffering in the peacebuilding operations in Mindanao. Due to the dysfunctional and weak social service delivery system of the government, NGOs are seen as part of the legitimate peace infrastructure, and it is seen that they make an immense contribution to the provision of social protection and to addressing the issue of deprivation and exclusion by harnessing what Gaventa (2006) labels as the productive aspect of power.

Ideally, NGOs are expected to create opportunities for largely powerless groups who are victims of exclusion, so that they can create platforms and claim spaces that are necessary for democratic inclusion. Humanitarian and emergency relief operations allow NGOs to have direct access to the conflict zone amidst problems of security. Their ground presence is strategic to indirectly inform and socialise the conflict-stricken civilians about the benevolent intentions of liberal donors, like the EU and World Bank, and to subtly diffuse liberal-democratic norms and practices.

NGOs and the domestication of the liberal peace

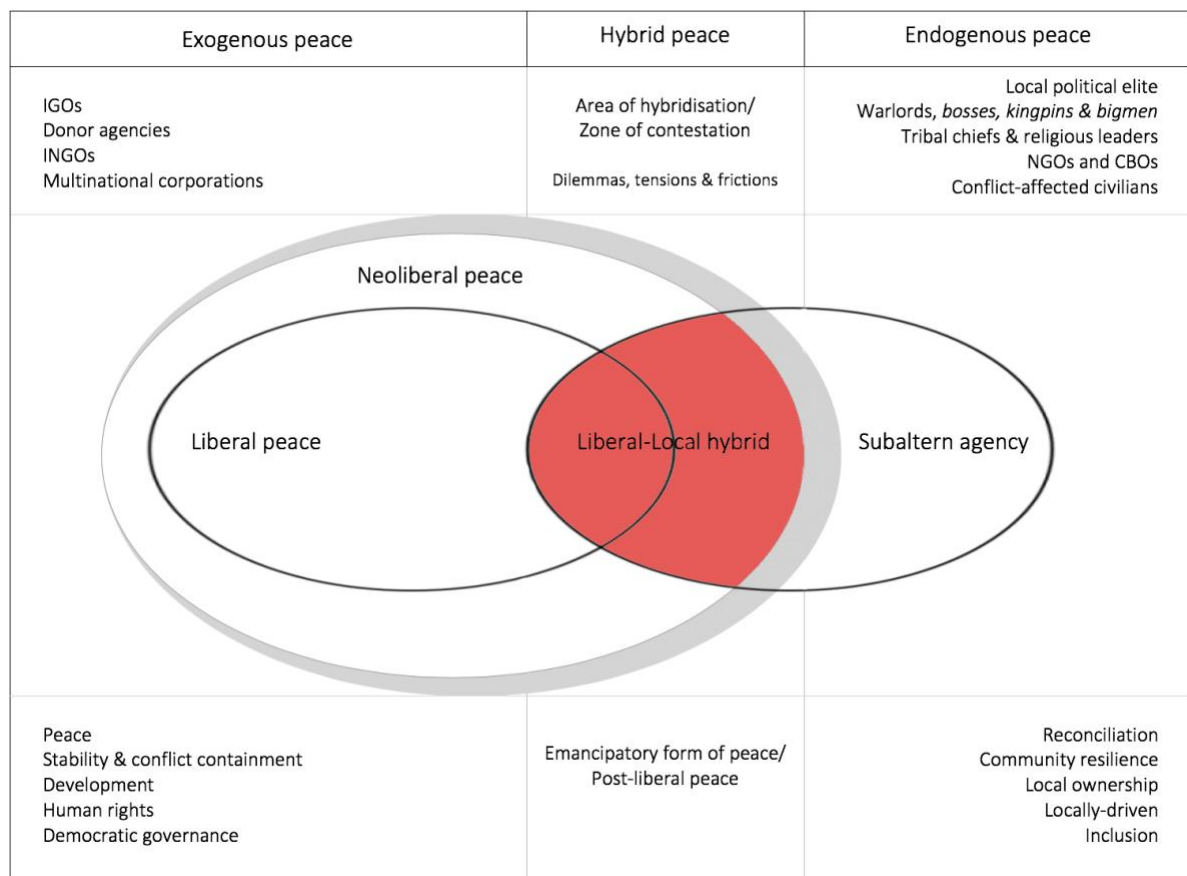
Liberal peacebuilding has risen to a status of prominence and popularity as a comprehensive peacebuilding model that guides the peace operations of IGOs and NGOs in many conflictual societies in the global south (Jackson 2018; Adam 2018; Espesor 2017b). These international peacebuilding actors have become active participants in the new wars and they have become part of the strategic complexes of the liberal peace in the post-Cold war environment (Duffield 2001). Despite its dominance, liberal peacebuilding has no concrete definition or definite referents (Newman et al. 2009; Mac Ginty 2010). Nonetheless, it is possible to identify the referents and indicators of liberal values and principles, which are persistently embedded in the peace

interventions of NGOs in Mindanao. These normative values that drive the activities of peace-building NGOs are arguably the empirical manifestations of the domestic variant of the liberal peace theory, which is traditionally applied in peace and conflict studies to analyse the dynamics of inter-state conflicts.

NGOs are the major agents of liberalism in the war-devastated region of the southern Philippines. Most of them conform to the liberal-democratic peacebuilding model, which is prescribed by IGOs and donors. It is the contention here that key elements of liberal peacebuilding are deeply entrenched in the activities of NGOs in war-riven Mindanao. The scholarship of Lewis (2014), Zürcher et al. (2013), Philpott (2012), Carey (2012), Warren (2011), Newman et al. (2009) and Diamond (2008) has established a consensus in the literature as to what can be called the major referents of liberal-democratic peacebuilding. As the primary representatives of civil society, NGOs are expected to perform complicated functions to aid democratisation and peacebuilding investments in conflictual societies. These functions include, but are not limited to, educating people to engage in public affairs; supporting poverty-stricken and marginalised groups; creating complex networks for war-riven populations; serving as watchdogs and election monitors; defending human rights; and creating and supporting liberal institutions in conflict-prone societies. In the southern Philippines, NGOs perform one of these functions, or a combination of these, to help initiate democratic transition and consolidation, despite the presence of active armed conflict. Nonetheless, these democratic functions of NGOs are not simply appreciated and accepted in the conflict zone, rather they are confronted with resistance and opposition from local powers that lead to the eventual distortion and modification of the key tenets of liberalism, and this facilitates the emergence of liberal-local hybrid peacebuilding.

Hybrid peace governance

Figure 3. Hybrid peace formation paradigm



Source: Author's diagram

The hybrid peace formation model illustrates the dynamic interface, mixture and distortion of exogenous and endogenous epistemologies of peace in conflictual societies (see Figure 3). The model exposes the asymmetric power relations between the dominant liberal/neoliberal peace paradigm and the marginalised local version of peace (see Richmond 2013). Scholars argue that the consolidation and reproduction of power asymmetries are a consequence of rules that which are embedded within institutional arrangements (Clegg 1989; Barnett and Duvall 2005). Powerful actors use critical resources as leverage to set the rules of the game. They tend to prescribe rules that emphasise their dominance in the hierarchy of power (Clegg 1989). Moreover, the model shows the fluidity and dynamism of the liberal peace due to its ability to evolve and expand its domain, as evidenced by its incorporation into neoliberalism. The liberal peace was co-opted by the neoliberal turn as neoliberal economics has been applied in post-conflict societies (Tom 2018).

Exogenous peace

The dominance of the liberal peace in international peacebuilding can best be explained using the post-structuralist notion of authoritative or hegemonic knowledge of Michel Foucault (1980) and Pierre Bourdieu (1991), where the rules of the game are defined and dictated by powerful actors. In this context, the liberal peace occupies a prominent status in the peacebuilding enterprise because it is promoted by powerful states and authoritative institutions in the international system. It is the peace paradigm that serves as the “software that drives the hardware” (Mac Ginty 2010, 396) of IGOs and NGOs that are involved in international peacebuilding operations. Although it is an interventionist policy (Chandler 2004), liberal peacebuilding is framed in a non-harmful manner, where external peacebuilders constantly reiterate their benevolent intention to promote stability and establish order in communities marred by protracted violent conflict.

IGOs and NGOs are guided by the assumption that a common path to peace is through liberal statebuilding. They treat conflictual societies in the global south as “virgin territories” (Newman et al. 2009, 23) that simply accept and uphold the Westphalian political and economic epistemology of stability, development, human rights, rule of law, and democratic governance which are the central tenets of liberal democracy. Established democracies in Western Europe are seen as strong states due to their inherent capacities to prevent, manage and counter the emergence of violent conflict in their respective territories. An example that supports such an assumption is the declaration of the European Union as a “peace project” by the Norwegian Nobel Committee in 2012 (Birchfield, Krige and Young 2017, 4). Hence, the global perception that peace is inherent in liberalism reinforces the ideational superiority and practical utility of liberal peacebuilding in contested and insecure corners of the globe, especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Amidst its prominence and sophistication, liberal peacebuilding is confronted with strong criticisms due to its inherent weaknesses, flaws and limitations, which are revealed in post-conflict polities, where it is applied by its agents. The critiques raised against liberal peacebuilding come from critical peacebuilding theorists. Richmond (2006, 307), for example, labelled the liberal peace as “virtual peace”, as it failed to establish a connection with people in its target communities; hence, it is insensitive to local needs and desires (Newman 2011). Moreover, Mac Ginty (2012, 287) calls it “routine peace” because of its preference of technocracy that favours the interests of NGOs which have established expertise in conflict mediation and resolution. At the community level, liberal peacebuilding faces different forms of local resistance due to its incompatibilities and incongruence with extant beliefs and institutions (Richmond 2010; Mac Ginty 2010).

Endogenous peace

To save the liberal peace from crisis and its ethical dilemmas, scholars have propounded alternatives to ensure its ideological relevance and practical value. Newman (2011), for example, argues that the securitisation of liberal peacebuilding is a key to the survival of the liberal peace. On the other hand, Mac Ginty (2011) suggests that the survival of this peacebuilding paradigm lies in its ability to adjust, acclimatise and, therefore, hybridise with local practices in conflictual polities where it is applied. The emergence of the liberal-local hybrid in peacebuilding suggests the progression of the liberal peace to post-liberalism. This shift to post-liberal peace or everyday peace offers emancipation to the morally bankrupt and overly stressed liberal peace paradigm because it empowers the local groups and makes them sensitive to the needs and desires of the population in the war zone (Richmond 2009; 2010).

Local actors are given primary importance in liberal-local hybrid peacebuilding as a strategic way of manufacturing international and local legitimacy. The challenge raised against the universal application and cosmopolitan value of the liberal peace epistemology facilitates the emergence of the “local turn”, which places heavy emphasis on the “nature and location of power” in a peace operation (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 763). Proponents of the local turn accentuate the primordial importance of the local population as key drivers of peace over international actors involved in peacebuilding (Paffenholz 2015). In the context of Mindanao, the local includes a whole range of liberal/transformational and illiberal/coercive actors, from local politicians, warlords/strongmen, tribal chieftains, religious leaders, local NGOs and community-based organisations, to ordinary civilians who are frequent victims of armed conflict (see Figure 3). Local actors possess the agency to resist, modify and distort exogenous liberal peace and present alternatives in a form of the endogenous version or local epistemology of peace. According to Mac Ginty (2015), the key features of endogenous peacebuilding are partnership and local ownership, both of which are vital to attain peace and acquire legitimacy among people in conflictual societies.

Therefore, mapping out the geographies of power of different local actors in the southern Philippines is useful in order to analyse the tensions and frictions when this local power and politics come into play with the liberal peacebuilding of donors and NGOs. I devote significant attention to revealing and illuminating the “hidden power” (Gaventa 2006, 29) held by actors in the conflict zone. The goal of this research is to expose the tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes of the liberal peace that are generated when it meets the local power and extant beliefs and institutions in

Mindanao. Finally, I will analyse the findings of the study through the lens of hybridity and hybridisation that is underutilized in investigating the dynamics of contemporary peace, conflict and security (Mac Ginty 2010).

Theoretical limitations of the research

The expanding nature⁶ of the liberal peace is indicated in the hybrid peace formation paradigm. The Western epistemology of peace has the tendency to either marginalise or assimilate non-Western forms of knowledge. From a Foucauldian perspective, the liberal peace has knowledge-generating power and it is capable of producing discourses that are ubiquitous. Examples of the local knowledge that might be hijacked by the dominant liberal peace are indigenous technology used in dispute settlement and customary mechanisms for dialogue and reconciliation. Although this is an interesting issue to look at from an academic point of view, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. Moreover, by investigating the process of the hybridisation of liberal-local in Mindanao, I do not intend to present a syncretic normative framework or a concrete product that is derived from hybridisation. Rather, I focus on the tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes that can be produced and reproduced during the hybridisation and securitisation of liberal peacebuilding in the southern Philippines.

2.9 | Conclusion

I argue that the politico-security regime in war-torn Mindanao is characterised by hybridity due to the existence of local strongmen with multiple sources of power, who are in control of both liberal/formal and illiberal/informal institutions. They have the indisputable agency to harness hybrid violence because of their military capability as owners of private militias. In rebel-dominated communities, the regime is also complex, as here the defining authorities are the commander-*ulama* hybrids. Moreover, a feature of complex regimes in Mindanao is the differential access to power or asymmetric power relations between the ‘powerful,’ who are the controllers of the technology of power and the ‘powerless,’ who are the frequent subject of exclusion and marginalisation. Nonetheless, it is not the intention of this study to romanticise the plight of less powerful actors by revealing their agency to claim and open up spaces at the community level.

⁶ See the shade of grey inside the circle in Figure 3.

The main subjects of this thesis are the NGOs, which are agents of the liberal peace and major participants in the internationally-supported peace governance in the southern Philippines. The goal of this study is to expose and analyse the tensions, frictions, dilemmas and contradictions that are generated by the interface between the liberal peacebuilding of NGOs and donors and the local power and politics in Mindanao, using hybridity as the primary theoretical lens. Moreover, liberal peacebuilding refers to the prominent model that guides the operations of international organisations, donor agencies and development NGOs in conflictual and post-conflict communities. Although it is a narrow definition of liberalism (see Owen 1994), this model puts premium on democracy promotion through the building of liberal institutions and diffusion of liberal-democratic norms and values, particularly human rights and rules of law, as a way of consolidating peace in conflict-ridden environments.

Finally, to illuminate tensions between the liberal peace and extant power in the war zone, it is important to employ critical ethnography to reveal the diffused nature and location of power held by more powerful and less powerful actors in the conflict zone. Hence, a power mapping exercise is necessary in this research, to sketch out the locations and intensities of power that highlight the prominence of local strongmen in Mindanao. A power map is a graphic illustration of the nodes of multi-factoral powers in conflict-ridden territory. Moreover, a robust ethnographic approach to understanding power is crucial in devising mechanisms for NGOs to transform power relations on the ground, which is a central feature in conflict transformation. Moreover, I endeavour to elevate ethnography to ethnology by presenting the theoretical implications of the study. The methodological design that highlights the importance of ethnography and ethnology in this study is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter III

Designing a Methodological Approach

This chapter contains a discussion of the research design of the study. In the methodology part of the thesis, I discuss the following details: the locations and duration of the research project; the strategies used in gathering data, particularly the materials and instruments used; the participants of the study; and the framework for the analysis of data and narratives that are acquired through extensive field research, especially in war-ridden communities in the southern Philippines.

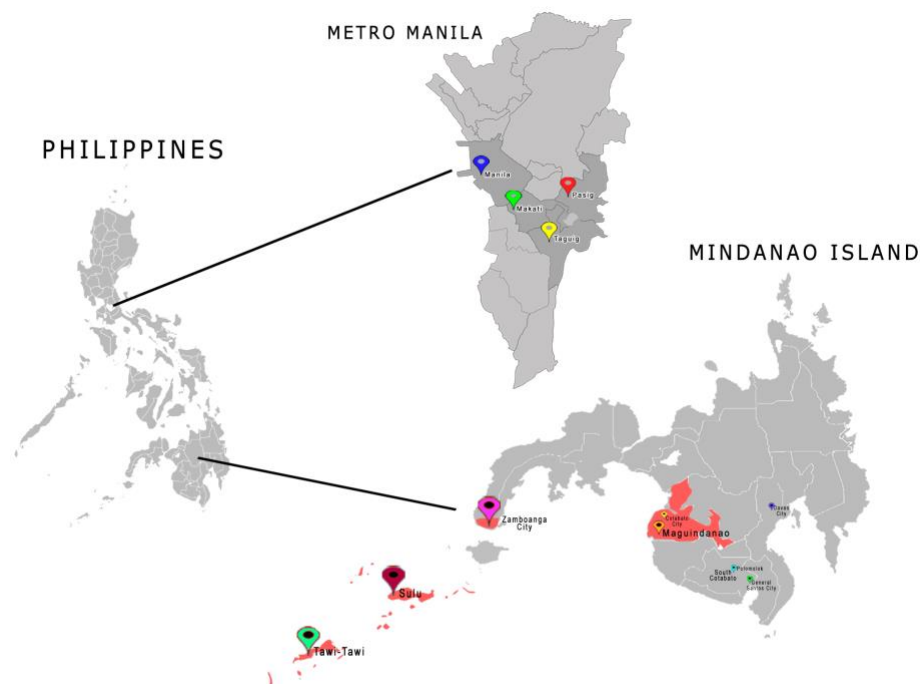
In this research, I employed a qualitative case study methodology to elicit answers to the research questions and to theoretically examine the issues and research gaps arising from the development and peacebuilding literature that pertain to the dynamic functions of NGOs in liberal peacebuilding operations. Case study analysis is a useful research tool for building theory, evaluating programmes and developing interventions or strategies. This tradition in research stresses the rigour of utilising data and information from varied sources through systemic exploration and thick description of context-specific phenomena (Baxter and Jack 2008). According to Robert Yin (2003), a case study approach is aptly suited to research projects that seek to answer “how” and “why” questions. He prescribes three criteria when using this research methodology. First, the researcher is not in a position to manipulate the behaviour of the participants. Second, the researcher aims to elicit contextual conditions deemed relevant to a phenomenon. Third, there is no clear delineation between the phenomenon and the context.

The goal of this study is to explain the tensions, dilemmas and contradictions that are generated due to the interface between the liberal peacebuilding of donors and NGOs, on the one hand, and local power and politics, on the other, in conflict-ridden Mindanao. Hence, producing a detailed case study of Mindanao is helpful to contribute to the debate on the local turn in peacebuilding or the emergence of liberal-local hybrid peace in conflictual societies caused by the incongruence between the Western epistemology of peace and the subaltern agency. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the case as a unit of analysis when investigating a context-bound phenomenon. The case studies included in this study are explanatory in nature and they seek to provide a rich and dense explanation of the complicated and transformative nature of the liberal peace project of NGOs

and donor institutions in the southern Philippines. The utility of an explanatory case study lies in its ability to explain the “presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies” (Yin 2003, 15). Although multiple case studies have more explanatory power than single case studies (Johnson and Joslyn 1986), I opted to focus on producing an explanatory case that is focused on Mindanao so as to draw a deep and critical understanding of the process of hybridisation due to the dynamic interaction of liberal peacebuilding and local forces and intricate power structures in the conflict zone. Mindanao is a sub-national conflict community in the southern Philippines that has become a major “theatre of action” (a term coined by Aron 2003, 54) of different international and local peacebuilding actors and institutions, particularly NGOs (see Adriano and Parks 2003).

3.1 | Locale and duration of the study

Figure 4. Field sites of the study in the Philippines



Source: Author's map

The ethnographic design of the thesis necessitated the conduct of extensive fieldwork in the southern Philippines. I gathered information and data through elite interviews and participatory forms of action research in conflict-affected provinces of Mindanao. I focused on gathering data in Cotabato City and Maguindanao Province. Cotabato is the industrial centre of NGOs and donors in the Bangsamoro and it is the seat of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

(ARMM) Government. On the other hand, the Province of Maguindanao hosts Camp Darapanan, the bailiwick and centre of governance of the MILF and the place with the highest frequency of violent conflict. I also collected information and conducted interviews in the key cities of Davao and General Santos, and in Polomolok, South Cotabato. I also conducted field observations in the city of Zamboanga, in Sulu and Tawi-tawi (see Figure 4). Moreover, I travelled to major cities in Metro Manila to interview key informants from the European Union, TAF, KAS and HD Centre. I presented preliminary results of the study in a round table discussion in the De La Salle University in Manila and received feedback from various academics.

I spent five months in total to complete fieldwork in the Philippines, in April 2016, then from July to August 2016, and from December 2017 to January 2018.

3.2 | Strategies in gathering data

In this study, I employed a combination of qualitative and participatory forms of research strategies in gathering data and narratives, particularly in the war zone of Mindanao. These strategies include the following:

- Case study analysis of the conflict-prone communities in the southern Philippines;
- In-depth interviews or elite interviews;
- Ethnographic field observation in war-torn polities in Mindanao;
- Participatory action research using rapid rural appraisal; and
- Desk review of secondary sources of information related to the peace operations of different actors in Mindanao. These sources include published books, and journal articles and on-line sources from reliable web pages of international organisations such as the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Conciliation Resources, The Asia Foundation, the European Union, and International Alert.

3.3 | Case studies and justification

Many qualitative case studies fall within the constructivist paradigm (Baxter and Jack 2008; Yin 2003). Constructivism, especially in the field of social science, claims that reality is a product of social construction, which is “ontologically subjective” (Searle 1995, 190). In this context, truth is relative and dependent on the perspective of an individual. Constructivists recognise the fact that

the creation of meaning is subjective to a person, yet at the same time, they are aware of the imperative to maintain objectivity when conducting research. This approach allows the researcher to have a close collaboration and engagement with the participants of the study. It also enables the participants to narrate their stories and describe their views of reality. These stories and narratives are useful for the researcher to understand the action and behaviour of the participants in the study (Baxter and Jack 2008).

A case study is an appropriate method to draw broad, but context-specific, analysis and understanding of the complex roles and functions of NGOs in securitising and hybridising the liberal peace in the context of intrastate conflict. The case study included in this research focuses on the mechanisms employed by NGOs in navigating the intricate power structures in the conflict zone, the tensions, friction and dilemmas that are produced because of their interaction with local power and politics in Mindanao, their contradictory roles in peacebuilding, and their controversial role of democratising illiberal and coercive local communities through the process of liberal norm diffusion.

3.4 | NGOs: the unit of analysis

The primary unit of analysis and subject of this study are the international, intermediate and local development NGOs that are actively participating in the peacebuilding operations in Mindanao. In effect, the inclusion of all NGOs working for peace and development in Mindanao is not feasible and practical. It worth noting that only development NGOs that claim to have a democratisation mandate were considered in this research project. Humanitarian NGOs like the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières are not considered as development NGOs.

It is the intention of this research to include diverse types of NGOs that are playing strategic roles in the peacebuilding operation in the southern Philippines. Mary Anderson (1999) prescribes four categories of NGOs according to the nature of their engagement in peacebuilding. The first group includes those NGOs providing humanitarian and emergency relief assistance to disaster-stricken communities; the second group comprises NGOs involved in long-term social and economic development; the third group consists of NGOs working for human rights; while the fourth group comprises NGOs that are involved in conflict mediation and resolution. I am aware that most

NGOs in Mindanao are not involved in only a single activity; rather they are doing a combination of these tasks that are executed in the name of liberal peacebuilding.

Goodhand (2006) classifies NGOs based on the modalities of their operations. These modalities are as follows: direct intervention, capacity building and advocacy. Direct intervention means that NGOs are providing services and implementing projects at the community level without the assistance of any intermediary institution. Capacity building is about developing the capacity of people in the conflict zone and local organisations for the sustainability of their projects. Lastly, advocacy-driven NGOs seek to bring reforms by influencing powerful policy and decision-making actors at the helm of leadership.

The scholarship of Anderson (1999) and Goodhand (2006) constitute conceptual justification for the selection of the NGOs included in the study. These NGOs participating in this research have varied focuses, priorities and levels of engagement in the peacebuilding operation in Mindanao. I selected and invited NGOs that have development mandates, peacebuilding advocacies, and engagement in the promotion of justice and human rights. The general criteria I used in the selection of NGOs are as follows: those with at least five years of track record in peacebuilding operations in Mindanao; those who are recipients and users of foreign aid and international development assistance from different donor agencies and voluntary organisations; and those with headquarters or a satellite office in the Philippines and who were most forthcoming.

I limited the investigation to development NGOs based on the criteria outlined above. Participating international NGOs included the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) [Germany], The Asia Foundation (TAF) [USA], the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) [USA] and the Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) [Switzerland]. The Institute for Autonomy and Governance (IAG)¹ and the Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao (AFRIM)² are the two intermediate NGOs that joined the study. Moreover, one local NGO based in Cotabato City, the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society also opted to participate in this research. The inclusion of these NGOs in the research project is warranted by the consent provided to the researcher by their respective country representatives and executive directors.

¹ IAG is the southern partner of KAS.

² AFRIM used to be the southern partner of the Dutch NGO, Inter-Church Organisation for International Development.

3.5 | In-depth interviews and justification

This research primarily relies on elite interviews or in-depth interviews (IDI) to generate insights that are vital in answering the research questions. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), IDI is useful to examine multiple perspectives of a few groups of people about a specific programme, situation or idea. This is the most appropriate method to be used when the researcher wants to ask open-ended questions to extract rich and relevant information from a variety of sources. It enables the researcher to probe the feelings and perspectives of the research participants (Guion, Diehl and McDonald 2011). The purpose of the elite interview, according to Hochschild (2009), is to obtain context-specific information, which only the respondents can provide regarding a particular process or event.

The elite interview method is an aptly suited technique to investigate the tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes that are produced by the hybridisation of liberal peacebuilding by NGOs and donors in the conflict zone of Mindanao. IDI is a useful method to elicit information from the participants of the study, about how NGOs deal and negotiate with complex power structures on the ground, and their mechanisms that seek to securitise and hybridise liberal peacebuilding and diffuse liberal democratic norms in war-prone communities in the southern Philippines. Moreover, this method allows the researcher to identify and analyse the complexities and challenges confronting NGOs in interacting with local strongmen who have multiple sources of power, and with less powerful actors who are the frequent victims of exclusion and marginalisation. It is worth noting that most of the information I have collected from the field are from elite interviews. The responses from elite respondents may have significantly shaped the findings and conclusions of the thesis. IDI is considerably weak in eliciting information about the subaltern dimensions of power and on the impacts of NGO peacebuilding operations upon vulnerable and powerless groups in the conflict zone. I am aware that an in-depth ethnographic engagement with people at the grassroots may have offered a different perspective about NGOs in the peace operations in Mindanao. However, due to the limitation of human ethics clearance for this research, I was not able to spend ample amount of time in villages of the Bangsamoro and talk to people there.

The primary instrument I used in this study is a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. This instrumentation allows the research participants to express their views freely in their own words. During the course of the interviews, I asked pre-planned questions of the respondents in a conversational and iterative manner. A digital voice recorder was used with permission to capture the proceedings of the interviews, and field notes were used to document

the respondents' non-verbal behaviour. This was necessary to draw a deeper meaning and understanding of the participants' responses.

3.6 | Sample and sampling technique

A problematic area in qualitative research is the determination of a sample size. Different researchers have made different suggestions as to the minimum number of key informants to be included in a qualitative study. However, according to Mason (2010), qualitative research projects have a smaller sample size compared with that of quantitative studies. He added that the qualitative studies are labour-intensive, and that including a large number of samples is not practical as it will require a longer time for the analysis. Traditional qualitative researchers, such as Glaser and Strauss, proposed the concept of saturation (1967 cited in Mason 2010), also known as theoretical saturation (Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006). This encourages the researchers to keep on collecting data as long as new insights are emerging from the respondents. The signal point for the researchers to stop collecting data is when no further unique responses are noted in the interviews (Mason 2010). According to Boyce and Neale (2006), the emergence of similar themes, issues, stories and topics from the interviews is an indication that the sample size has been reached. Morse (1995) acknowledged the significance of saturation in qualitative research. Nonetheless, she emphasised the difficulty of reaching saturation due to the absence of any explicitly-defined rules or standards for estimating the sample size (cited in Guest et al. 2006).

In their methodological article *How Many Interviews are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability*, Guest et al. (2006) reveal that some prominent authors of books on qualitative research have provided guidelines for actual sample sizes. Bernard and Morse, for instance, suggest 30 to 60 participants for ethnographic research. For grounded theory, Creswell recommends a sample size of 20 to 30 interviews, while Morse's recommendation is to have 30 to 60 research participants. In phenomenology, the number of participants, according to Creswell, should be five to 25. Morse contends that having at least six participants is sufficient for phenomenological studies. Finally, Bertaux argues that, in qualitative research, the smallest sample size is 15 participants. Despite their suggestions, these authors have failed to present any empirical evidence that could support and back up their recommendations.

3.7 | Participants of the study

The key informants of the study are selected according to one primary criterion: expertise and overall knowledge of security, peace and conflict issues in Mindanao. However, it is impossible to formulate a set of pre-determined criteria that are applicable to all informants as they are not homogenous. In this research, I aim to generate multiple perspectives from varied sources to reinforce the objectivity and reliability of the findings and analyses of the data.

Interviewing elites is important in gathering rich and substantial information for this study. Unlike most ordinary people, the elite participants are directly involved in the peace operations and hold the information that is needed for this study. Moreover, interviewing ordinary civilians for this research might put them at risk, unlike the elite, who are protected by their powers. The key informants of this study are experts from the academic, national and local government institutions, donor agencies, civil society and NGOs, and rebel groups. The following are the participants of the research:

- a. university professors, peace scholars and advocates who have keen interest in peace and conflict studies;
- b. senior government officials in the Philippines, particularly from agencies that have direct involvement in the socio-economic reconstruction of conflict-stricken communities and other peace work;
- c. key personnel of donor agencies and international contact groups based in Metro Manila;
- d. NGO peace and development workers;
- e. local politicians and community leaders in Mindanao; and
- f. key leaders of the MILF.

Table 1. Distribution of research informants per category

Categories	Number of Participants	
	Male	Female
Academics and university professors	7	3
National and local government officials	1	5
Donor agencies and IOs personnel	6	1
NGO workers	7	3
Armed Forces of the Philippines	3	1
Community leaders	2	0
MILF leaders	6	1
Total	32	14
	46	

As shown in Table 1, I interviewed a total of 46 key individuals from seven different sectors who have direct involvement in the peacebuilding operations in the southern Philippines. Most of the respondents are academics and NGO personnel. I interviewed university professors and directors of research centres of Mindanao State University, Notre Dame University, Ateneo de Davao University and De La Salle University in Manila. Key leaders of participating NGOs were interviewed in major cities in Mindanao and Metro Manila. While conducting fieldwork in Metro Manila, I had the opportunity to interview some high-ranking officials of donor agencies and country directors of INGOs based in the Philippines. To get multiple perspectives and to balance narratives, I also interviewed key individuals from the Armed Forces of the Philippines, MILF, local communities, and local and national government agencies in the Philippines. For this type of research, it is difficult to ensure gender balance in the number of male and female elite respondents. Hence, in this study, 32 of the respondents are male and only 14 are female.

I employed the purposive or snowball method as a sampling technique for this research. This technique is a strategic innovation to pinpoint the participants of the study (Miller 2005). According to Lamont and White (2005), snowball sampling enables the researcher to identify key informants of the study by referral from other respondents with whom the researcher has had a previous engagement. They claim that informants are more inclined to share reliable and even sensitive information with the researcher, if referred by someone they know. They added that snowball sampling is useful for the researcher to identify suitable participants for the study when doing expert or elite interviews. In this research, I found that the snowball technique is effective when gaining access to respondents with high profiles, such as the key leaders of the MILF, country directors of INGOs and officials of donor agencies. For instance, I was allowed to enter an MILF stronghold in Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao to personally interview the most senior rebel leader, Ghazali Jaafar, because of the referral by other respondents from the Bangsamoro Development Authority. Hence, the use of an informal network is helpful in research, to access participants like rebel leaders and commanders.

It is important to disclose in this research that I used my institutional linkages and networks in the Philippines in the recruitment and selection of research participants. In my capacity as an academic in the Department of Political Science of the Mindanao State University in General Santos City, I was able to ask the permission of the NGOs to participate in the study. The connection I had previously built with the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the MILF was helpful in gathering

sensitive and even confidential information that is absolutely essential to enrich the substance of the thesis.

3.8 | Ethnographic field observation, participatory action research and justification

The design of the study necessitates the use of an ethnographic technique to substantially address the research questions. Anthropologists and ethnographers typically employ participant observation as a research strategy (Iphofen 2013; Demunck and Sobo 1998). In this research, I conducted participant observation in conflict-affected communities in the southern Philippines, where NGOs are implementing aid-funded peacebuilding projects. Participant observation is a process that enables the researcher to study the actions of people in their natural environment by observing and participating in their activities (Schensul, Schensul and Le Compte 1999). The use of ethnography in understanding the dynamics of conflict at the community level may generate suspicion among the local population. For example, in his research on the New People's Army in the Philippines Nerve Valerio Macaspac (2017), an academic from the University of California, Los Angeles, warns ethnographers that their presence on the ground might be construed by community members as an intelligence gathering mission. Therefore, in conducting research in the conflict affected communities in Mindanao, I made sure that I was accompanied by influential individuals who referred me to key leaders. This security protocol is crucially important to ensure safety and to deter any possibility of suspicion that might prevent key informants from participating in the study, or that might make them withhold valuable information. I emphasised this protocol when I was talking to the top leaders of the MILF.

According to Dewalt and Dewalt (1998), participant observation is a research tool that is useful for data collection and analysis. For these authors, this method of research reinforces not only the quality of fieldwork data, but also the quality of interpretation. According to Bernard (1994), building rapport with the members of the community is necessary when doing participant observation. It is important for the researcher to bring checklist and questionnaires. He also emphasises the need for researchers to interview people in a natural or typical manner of conversation because,

Unstructured interviewing is also excellent for building rapport with informants, before moving to more formal interview, and it's useful for talking to informants who might not tolerate a more formal interview. The personal rapport you build

with close informants in long-term fieldwork can make highly structured interviewing—and even semi-structured interviewing—feel somehow unnatural. In fact, really structured interviewing can get in the way of your ability to communicate freely with key informants (Bernard 1994, 165-166).

The three types of participant observations are descriptive, focused and selective (Angrosino and de Perez 2000). Descriptive observation allows the researcher to collect any piece of information from the field with the assumption that he/she knows nothing about the community. Nonetheless, the danger is that the researcher is likely to gather unnecessary and irrelevant data by using this type of observation. Focused observation relies heavily on interviews if the researcher has clear guidance about what to observe in the community. Finally, selective observation is more appropriate when the intention of the researcher is to see the variation in people's different activities at the community level (Kaluwich 2005).

The data gathered through ethnographic observation is useful to triangulate information (see Guion, Diehl and McDonald 2011) generated through elite interviews and participatory action research strategy. More specifically, I employed focused observation to detect and document tensions and frictions that are produced from the interaction of liberal peacebuilding of NGOs and donors with local power and politics in the southern Philippines. Moreover, I focused on understanding the nature and location of power in the conflict zone of Mindanao, which is a key aspect in the contemporary “local turn” (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 763) of peacebuilding operations (Paffenholz 2015).

Due to limited time for fieldwork and the obvious security issue, I conducted a power mapping exercise to plot the nodes and intensities of power, using a participatory action research strategy called Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). This action research tool has practical value in assessing the needs of the people, especially those displaced by violent conflict, and in analysing the overall situation of the community. Moreover, RRA enables the researcher to gather data in the field in an expeditious and organised fashion (International Union for the Conservation of Nature 2009).

RRA is a qualitative research strategy that is commonly employed by NGOs and civil society institutions like the American faith-based NGO, CRS,³ which employs RRA in doing community

³ See Freudenberger, Karen Schoomaker. 2008. *Rapid Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rural Appraisal: A Manual for CRS Field Workers and Partners*. Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services.

needs assessment and evaluating the impacts of its project at the community level. RRA is a top-down approach and requires less active participation from members of the community. Although it is less participatory, it gives greater importance to the harvesting of quality and reliable data that are helpful in meeting the research objectives. The time required in an intensive RRA study is four to eight days. Researchers are advised to work closely with members of the community through the use of different techniques, such as seasonal calendar, Venn diagramming, transect and social mapping (Freudenberger 2008).

In this research, RRA is a supplementary research tool to enhance the quality and validity of data and narratives captured through key informant interviews. Based on the review of academic publications related to the peace, security and conflict in Mindanao, I was able to come up with a tentative power map. The initial power map was based on the scholarship of prominent Mindanao scholars like Abinales (2016), Cagoco-Guiam (2013), Abuza (2014) and Hutchcroft (2016) and Lara and Schoofs (2013). Using Venn diagramming, I prepared a crude power map of Mindanao that highlights the existence of multiple power centres in the conflict zone. The literature survey enabled me to form a list of powerful political clans or local strongmen and their multiple sources of power. During the course of the fieldwork, I presented the unpolished power map and tentative list of local strongmen to the research participants and asked for their comments, reactions and suggestions. Based on their remarks, I modified and finalised the power map and updated the list of local strongmen in five provinces in the southern Philippines.

It is important to explain more clearly how the power mapping exercise is done and contextualise the power map for this research. As in a typical Venn diagram, the power mapping exercise uses small and large circles to represent groups and actors who are participating in the game of power in the Bangsamoro. There is a consensus among Mindanao scholars and elite interviewees that the local strongmen are the most influential power brokers in the conflict zone because they are wielding multi-factoral powers from different sources, licit and illicit. Hence, these local strongmen are represented by overlapping circles and placed at the centre of the power map to illustrate their relative importance in a power game in the Bangsamoro. They are also the central focus of the power mapping exercise due to their complex interactions with other major power brokers, including the Philippine government, belligerent organisations, humanitarian agencies and marginalised groups.

The presence of subsets is an important aspect of the power map. There are small circles that are placed within larger circles: these small circles represent the components of broader categories, which are symbolised by big circles. For example, international and local NGOs, IGOs and donor agencies are lumped together under the category of humanitarian agencies. The colour assigned to each category is indicative of a close association among its subsets. For instance, different shades of red are used to represent the Muslim insurgent groups and their affiliate organisations. Meanwhile, the size of the bubbles indicates the intensity of power of each group. Hence, a larger circle indicates higher intensity of power, as perceived by the participants of the study. The lines that link each actor in the power map are a simple characterisation of the relationship of local strongmen with other power brokers in the conflict zone. The participants in the study described the strongmen's links with other groups as direct (straight line), erratic (thick straight line) and hostile (straight line marked with 'x').

The power map is a simple graphic illustration of the networks and power of actors in the conflict zone. The placements and relationships of actors in the map are extrapolated from elite interviews and participatory action research exercises. The explanations provided by the research participants when they were drawing and describing the map are documented and employed by the researcher in the analysis of empirical findings of the thesis. Some of the participants have provided concrete examples of how local actors interact with each other, while others simply shared a general overview of the power landscape in the Bangsamoro. It is understandable that some of the elite participants from the MILF were hesitant to share sensitive information during interviews because they were currently negotiating a peace deal with the Philippine government. Moreover, the power map is likely to change because of the current political development in the Bangsamoro, particularly the formal entry of the MILF into power in the new autonomous region.

As stated in the conceptual framework, the goal of this research is to expose and analyse the dilemmas, tensions and contradictions that are generated when NGOs hybridise and securitise liberal peacebuilding in Mindanao. To substantially contextualise the tensions between the liberal peace and subaltern power and politics in a conflict zone, and the dilemmas of the emerging "local or cultural turn" (Bräuchler and Naucke 2017) in peacebuilding, it is helpful for this research to use critical ethnography to reveal the nature and geographies of the power possessed by different powerful and less powerful actors in Mindanao.

An anthropological approach has become an imperative to gain an empirical understanding of the ambivalence of the local turn in peace operations. In this context, Bräuchler and Naucke (2017) challenge the disciplines, particularly political and legal sciences, in their ability to engage in peace and conflict studies using anthropological approaches. This research strategy is vital to gain,

Anthropologically informed methodological and conceptual advancement that the local turn is asking for and by providing a better understanding of how the local can become an important reference point in peace and conflict studies without essentialising it (Bräuchler and Naucke 2017, 422).

Finally, the scholarship of Richmond (2012), Paffenholz (2015), and Brauchler and Naucke (2017), which calls for ethnographic research in contemporary peacebuilding, constitutes sufficient justification for employing ethnography and ethnology in this thesis. A micro-level approach in gathering first-hand information from the conflict zone is useful in writing a detailed case study of Mindanao, which cannot be achieved by desk research that is dependent on secondary sources of information.

3.9 | Scope and limitation

The scope of this research is confined to the dynamic involvement of NGOs in the peace operations in the southern Philippines, especially in the way they navigate the intricate power structures in the conflict zone. The primary units of analysis or subjects of the study are the participating international, intermediate and local NGOs that have long-term involvement in conflict resolution and transformation in Mindanao. These NGOs have at least five years of experience in peacebuilding and they are using foreign aid from multilateral and bilateral donor agencies. It is not the intention of this study to include the findings and analyses from aid-funded peacebuilding initiatives of formal government agencies and faith-based civil society organisations, though I am aware that these initiatives may mutually reinforce and complement the transformative potentialities of the peacebuilding interventions of NGOs in Mindanao.

Limited time and resources are the primary considerations in gathering data for this study. I conducted extensive fieldwork in conflict-affected communities in the southern Philippines and in the key cities of Mindanao and Metro Manila in April, July and August 2016. Additional fieldwork in Mindanao was carried out between December 2017 and January 2018, to further

enrich the quality of data presented. For security reasons, I opted not to include, as field sites of the study, the Provinces of Lanao del Sur and Basilan, and the City of Marawi, which have been recently occupied by the Maute Group, an IS-affiliated terrorist organisation.

In doing participant observation, I spent limited time in conflict-affected communities. Interviews of key informants from these places were carried out in cities like General Santos and Davao, so that they could freely share insights based on their experiences and interaction with people in the conflict zone. Controversial claims, like the hijacking of NGO projects by warlord politicians, and the collusion of NGOs, local politicians and rebel commanders, are freely expressed by the participants because they were in safe localities.

The precarious security in the conflict zone in the southern Philippines is the primary consideration that was taken into account during the entire course of fieldwork. According to the travel advisory agencies in New Zealand,⁴ there is extreme risk in most parts of Mindanao, including Maguindanao, which is the major locale of this research. To address problems of security in acquiring data from the field, I used RRA technique, particularly Venn diagramming, to do the power mapping exercise and stocktaking of the different sources of power of local strongmen in conflict-prone communities in the region. Other RRA tools, such as the seasonal calendar method and social mapping, have not been used, as I had very limited engagement within the community. The theoretical limitations of the thesis are elaborated in the theoretical framework in Chapter Two.

3.10 | Analysis of data

The analytical framework for this study is based on the scholarship dealing with qualitative research, of Srivastava and Thomson (2009) and Ritchie and Spencer (1994). The Framework Analysis of Srivastava and Thomson (2009) is designed for studies that seek to answer specific questions, that gather data within a limited time, that acquire information from pre-identified informants, and deal with *a priori* issues. Using this framework, the research has to identify and formulate key issues and emerging themes by sifting, charting and sorting data from multiple and varied sources. This approach enables the researcher to understand and interpret data and move from a descriptive account to a conceptual explanation of data (Furber 2010) by categorising or collating related themes (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick 2008).

⁴ visit <https://www.safetravel.govt.nz>

Ritchie and Spencer (1994) stress the difficult role of the researcher as analyst of unstructured and bulky materials collected from the field. Qualitative studies demand a “systematic and rigorous” approach and hence are “labour-intensive and time consuming” (Burnard et al. 2008, 432). The rigour and difficulty associated with the conduct of qualitative research is accurately stated in the writing of Ritchie and Spencer. According to these authors,

Qualitative data analysis is essentially about detection, and the tasks of defining, categorising, theorising, explaining, exploring, and mapping are fundamental to the analyst’s role. The methods used for qualitative analysis therefore need to facilitate such detection, and to be of a form which allows certain functions to be performed (Ritchie and Spencer 1994, 176).

The steps involved that are prescribed in analysis of qualitative data are as follows: familiarisation; identifying a thematic framework or creating typologies; indexing, charting and mapping; interpretation and developing new theories, strategies and ideas (Srivastava and Thomson 2009; Ritchie and Spencer 1994).

Familiarisation is the process through which the researcher becomes acquainted with and immersed in the data transcripts from field notes, and the information collected through interviews. This step is important for the researcher to have an overview of the information gathered from the field. The analyst is encouraged to listen to recorded interviews, study field notes and constantly read transcripts to attain familiarisation and define concepts through understanding of the internal structures of data (Srivastava and Thomson 2009; Ritchie and Spencer 1994). This process enables the researcher to take note of emerging key ideas and recurring themes from the data set (Srivastava and Thomson 2009).

Next to familiarisation is the identification of the thematic framework when the emerging themes and issues in the data set are noted. It is possible for the researcher to discover that the emerging themes have been identified as *a priori* issues, based on the review of the literature. At this stage, the researcher allows the “data to dictate the themes and issues” (Srivastava and Thomson 2009, 76). The issues, concepts and themes noted from the participants of the research provide a basis for the construction of the thematic framework, which is useful for sorting and sifting the data. The researcher should be mindful of not forcing data that do not conform to *a priori* issues. The

thematic framework is tentative and subject to further refinement as the process continues. The researcher needs to employ logic and intuition in formulating and refining a thematic framework in order to give meanings to concepts, to justify the relevance and importance of issues, and to establish the relationship between emerging ideas. More importantly, the primary task of the researcher is to fully address the original research questions (Ritchie and Spencer 1994).

The process of identifying sections of data that are related to the individual theme is called indexing. The researcher has to apply this process to all textual data found in the interview transcripts and field notes. Ritchie and Spencer (1994) suggest assigning a number for each theme and writing it in the margin beside the text as a way of indexing references.

The next stage is the charting of data, where specific pieces of information that are previously indexed are arranged in charts according to themes. This process requires the researcher to lift the data from its “original textual context” (Srivastava and Thomson 2009, 76) and arrange it in charts with headings and subheadings based on a previously identified thematic framework. This process is important to ensure clarity in the organisation and sequencing of concepts and ideas from raw field data (Ritchie and Spencer 1994).

The final stage in the analysis of qualitative data involves mapping and interpretation. The researcher needs to come up with a schematic diagram of the phenomenon under investigation through the analysis of key characteristics of the data in the charts. This process, although rigorous (Burnard et al. 2008), is useful for the researcher trying to interpret the data set in a systematic fashion. At this stage, the researcher is expected to have a clear grasp of the objectives of qualitative study. This expectation includes the ability to define concepts, map the range and nature of phenomena, create typologies, find associations, provide explanations, and develop strategies, ideas and theories (Ritchie and Spencer 1994). Moreover, Srivastava and Thomson underscore the need for the researcher to ensure that the concepts, technologies and associations reflect the perspectives of the research participants, and that the recommendations drawn from the research echo the “true value, attitudes and beliefs” (2009, 76) of the informants of the study.

3.11 | Confidentiality and disclosure of research funding

The disclosure and utilisation of information shared and provided by the participants of the study are dealt with using utmost confidentiality. The collection, presentation and publication of the data

of this research strictly observe the guidelines prescribed by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. The Committee has approved this research project and provided clearance for the researcher to conduct high-risk research in the conflict zone in the southern Philippines.

All data and information from the research respondents are used for academic purposes only. During the course of fieldwork in Mindanao, participants of the study were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the interview if they wished to do so. Only the researcher and his supervisors have access to raw and processed research data. More importantly, participants of the study provided written consent and authorised the researcher to mention their names and the name of their organisations in the resulting manuscript. Nonetheless, I opted to anonymise all sources when writing the empirical sections of the thesis, due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of most narratives and information used in this research. By including controversial and confidential information in this research, I have no desire to compromise the safety and security of the research participants or the organisations that participated in this study.

Finally, I have requested a two-year embargo of the manuscript from the Library of the University of Canterbury after submitting the thesis in its final form. The embargo is important for the security of the researcher, his supervisors and all the other people who participated. The two-year embargo is also necessary for the conversion of the thesis into a book project.

This research is fully funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the New Zealand Government and the New Zealand European Union Centre Network. Moreover, I originally conceptualised the research as a two-country study that included Mindanao in the Philippines and Aceh in Indonesia as field sites. I also conducted extensive research in conflict-riven communities in post-conflict Aceh from May to June 2016, in order to interview NGO personnel, Indonesian Government authorities and former leaders of the *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or Free Aceh Movement. However, after doing fieldwork in two countries, I realised that I had gathered too much data, which became unwieldy. Therefore, following the advice of my supervisors, I dropped the case study of Aceh and devoted attention to producing an empirically-grounded and substantial case study of Mindanao.

3.12 | Conclusion

The major goal of this research is to reveal the tensions, frictions, dilemmas and paradoxes that are produced and constantly reproduced when the liberal peacebuilding of NGOs and donors interact with local power and politics in the southern Philippines, using hybridity as the theoretical lens. In order to contextualise the dynamic and contradicting process of hybridisation of the liberal peace and subaltern or local agencies, a robust and intensive ethnographic and elicitive methodology was necessary for this research. I employed a combination of qualitative and participatory action research strategies to gather rich and dense information and narratives, particularly concerning the multiple centres and geographies of power from the ground where violent conflict in Mindanao is taking place. A multidisciplinary approach is vital to acquire data for this thesis so as to provide empirical evidence to support the major arguments presented in this study. Moreover, the robust, intensive and even dangerous nature of the fieldwork I conducted for this research project is designed to enhance the quality of the study and reinforce the validity and objectivity of the entire project.

Chapter IV

NGOs, Geographies of Power and Complex Regimes

NGOs are heavily involved as drivers of socio-economic development in the peace operation in the subnational conflict community of Mindanao, in the southern Philippines. The ongoing interests of the international community, through the provision of foreign aid (see Adriano and Parks 2013), have enabled NGOs to engage in a wide array of peacebuilding functions in conflict-riddled Mindanao. These initiatives are aimed toward fostering peace and development, which have eluded the southern part of the Philippines for decades, since the onset of the insurgency in the 1970s.

For more than four decades of armed confrontations between the soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the renegades of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and, eventually, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), violent conflict has been an everyday reality for the people of Mindanao. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed, and others have experienced repeated displacement due to violence brought about by skirmishes between the warring parties (see Espesor 2019; South 2017). Mindanao's security environment has become more complicated due to clan feuding that facilitates horizontal forms of violence (Torres 2007). In fact, Mindanao not only hosts belligerent organisations and millenarian groups, but it is also home to notorious warlord clans, which have the indisputable capacity to disrupt security arrangements in the Bangsamoro (Lara 2010; 2014).

Extreme poverty thrives in the conflict-affected communities of Mindanao. Civilians are not in a position to engage in productive economic activities owing to the intermittent outbreak of war and to limited employment opportunities. Poor governance and dysfunctional service delivery systems in war-ridden localities have facilitated widespread impoverishment and dismal living conditions for people in the war zones. These alarming social realities are sufficient justification for civil society actors, particularly NGOs, to fill the gap and engage in social service delivery through their peacebuilding efforts in the region. Most of the NGOs involved in the peace operations perform a complementary role as an alternative channel of social service delivery to poor and marginalised communities. They have become prominent players in the peace operation

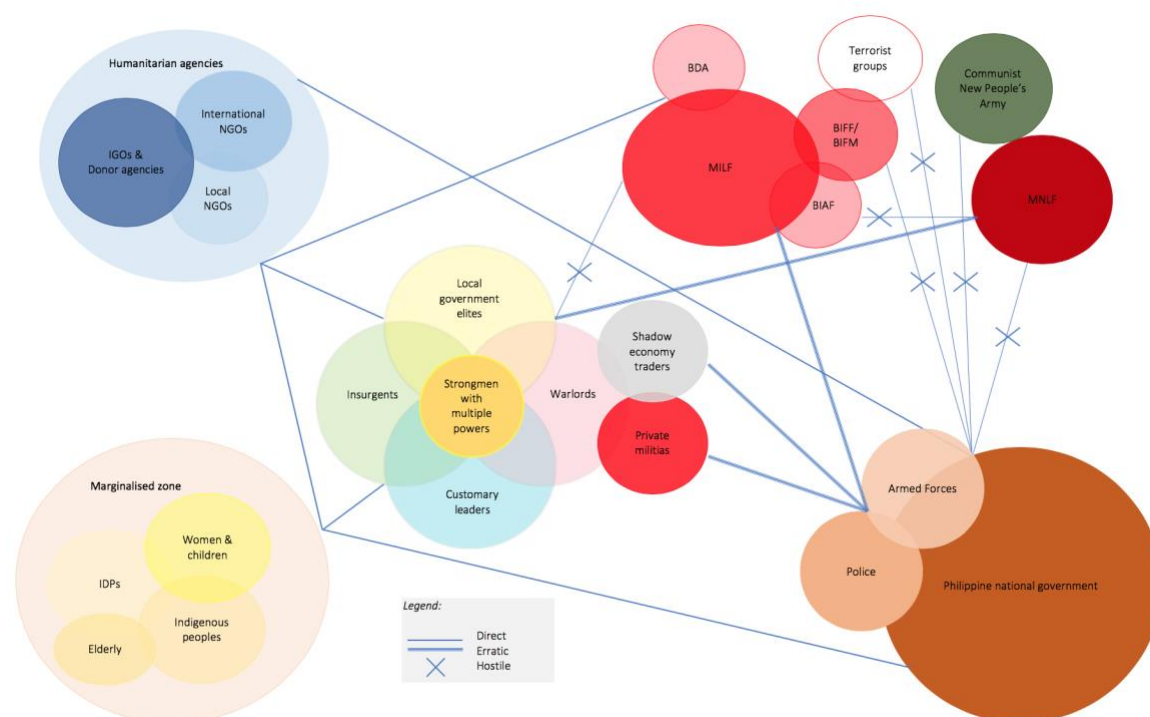
in Mindanao with their engagement in multi-track peacebuilding (Espesor 2017b) from elite-level negotiation to facilitation of community dialogues and provision of basic social protection to powerless and marginalised groups at the grassroots.

I argue in this research that NGOs make an important contribution to peacebuilding and democratisation in Mindanao, especially in helping powerless civilians in the conflict zone. However, Mindanao is a precarious theatre of action for most NGOs and donor institutions that are involved in liberal peacebuilding operations. In this chapter of the thesis, I endeavour to answer the research question, why does Mindanao's complex political regime constitute a precarious environment for NGOs and donor agencies?

This chapter begins with the illustration and contextualisation of Mindanao as a complex political community that contains multiple sources of power. To contextualise complex regimes, I will present a power map that shows the nodes, geographies and intensities of power and highlights the dominance of warlord politicians in the conflict zone of Mindanao. The power map is a graphic representation of different actors and their powers and networks on the ground, based on the information shared by the research participants. It is a snapshot of the ethnographic fieldwork that is meant to expose power dynamics among different power brokers in war-torn Bangsamoro. It is an important fieldwork tool for the researcher to identify who are the powerful and powerless groups in the conflict zone. It is worth noting that, in reality, the relationships of these actors are more dynamic and complex and, therefore, not rigid that can be drawn and explained in a one-dimensional map. In this research, I referred to the power map as the 'geographies of power' because the actors and groups in the conflict zone are located in space (see Chapter Three for the additional explanation and contextualisation of the power map). After explaining why Mindanao has a complex political regime, I will analyse the different mechanisms and strategies employed by NGOs in dealing with local rulers with multiple sources of power in the Bangsamoro. Lastly, I will explain why Mindanao is a dangerous and perilous place for peacebuilding organisations, particularly NGOs, and how they manage this security dilemma.

4.1 | Bangsamoro's power landscape and NGO engagement with the 'powerful'

Figure 5. Geographies of power of conflict-affected communities in Mindanao



Source: Author's diagram based on the interviews and participatory action research with academics and NGO personnel in Mindanao.

As shown in the power map, the greatest amount of local power¹ tends to be concentrated in the hands of local strongmen whose powers come from multiple sources (see overlapping circles in the centre of the map). Most of them, if not all, are both economic and political elite in the Bangsamoro, who are in possession and control of private armies. These private armies are crucially important to protect and preserve the positions, status and illicit businesses of the local rulers (see Lara and Schoofs 2013). Some members of the security forces of the state are even part of the informal militias of these local rulers.² In most cases, the members of the Citizen Armed

¹ The amount of power is represented by centrality.

² Confidential interview with a Philippine Navy officer, General Santos City, 2 July 2016.

Force Geographical Units (CAFGU) and Civilian Volunteer Organisations (CVO) are recruited as private armies of warlord politicians.³

Another major layer of power belongs to the rebel organisation, MILF, which is currently negotiating a peace settlement with the Philippine government. There are some communities in the southern Philippines that are under the control of the MILF. The people in these communities are more loyal to the rebel organisation than to the government. The MILF acts as a *de facto* government in its controlled territories and has its command centre at Camp Darapanan, Maguindanao. The MILF has a hostile relationship with most of the local rulers of Mindanao. These local rulers are blamed by the MILF for the abject poverty and glaring underdevelopment in the Bangsamoro.⁴ In addition, the MNLF remains an influential separatist movement in some parts of Mindanao, especially in the island provinces. From its command post in the Island of Sulu, the MNLF-Misuari faction opposes the efforts of the MILF to enter into a peace pact with the Philippine government.⁵

The relationship of the MILF with the AFP is erratic. Although in some instances these two groups have engaged in armed confrontations, there are other instances where the rebels and Philippine soldiers have worked together to promote peace. The Joint Coordinating Committee for the Cessation of Hostilities (JCCCH), for example, is an ad hoc structure comprising the MILF and AFP, designed to protect the integrity of the existing ceasefire agreement.⁶ Extremist groups, such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter (BIFF) and Abu Sayyaf, also exercise power in their respective domains to protect their own interests (Espesor 2019).

The development sector, comprising of international and local NGOs, donor agencies and international organisations, has its own sphere of power by engaging in the lucrative business of the peacebuilding operation in Mindanao. The target recipients of foreign-aid-funded initiatives and humanitarian assistance of IOs and NGOs are certain groups in the marginalised zones, such as women and children, IDPs, indigenous people and the elderly. Moreover, NGOs and their donors give favours to the MILF, by providing funds to transform rebel camps into peace and

³ Confidential interview with a Philippine Marine officer, Tawi-tawi, 13 January 2018.

⁴ Confidential interview with a senior leader of the MILF, Pigkalagan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao Province, 22 July 2016.

⁵ Confidential interview with a Philippine Navy officer, General Santos City, 2 July 2016.

⁶ Confidential interview with a commanding general of the Philippine Army and high-ranking cabinet official, General Santos City, 18 August 2016.

development communities through the use of foreign aid.⁷ Finally, despite the dominance of the local rulers and the lingering influence of the MILF in the Bangsamoro, the Philippine government remains the most powerful actor. It can employ its military power to crush its enemies as demonstrated in the “all-out-war” policy of the Estrada administration (see Lara and Schoofs 2013, 27), which annihilated the MILF’s Camp Abu-Bakr. When President Arroyo declared martial law in Maguindanao, the patriarch of the powerful Ampatuan Family and his sons, who are the suspected perpetrators of the Maguindanao Massacre in 2009 were arrested by the security forces of the state (see Gavilan 2016). The Ampatuan clan is Arroyo’s known political ally in Maguindanao (see Lara 2014).

The complexities of the power structure in the conflict zone in the southern Philippines can be best understood by using a Power Mapping Exercise (PME) that is conducted through a participatory form of research. It illustrates the multiplicity of power centres in the Bangsamoro by identifying the different power holders, brokers and ‘gatekeepers’. It also explains why these individuals are considered powerful through critical assessment of the sources and intensities of their powers. It also shows how other groups, especially development and peacebuilding NGOs and donors, engage in a power game in Mindanao. Moreover, it demonstrates the process through which relatively powerless groups, particularly women and children, internally displaced persons, and indigenous peoples are marginalised by protracted armed conflict. This state of marginalisation is aggravated by the asymmetries of power in the Bangsamoro that favour the interests of powerful and influential groups. Mindanao is home to what Gaventa (2006) calls a wide variety of ‘the powerful’ who have ‘power over’ other groups. The ‘powerful’ comprises local political elite, traditional and religious leaders, insurgent organisations, terrorist and extremist groups, warlords, landlords, and even drug lords, who are involved in narco-politics⁸ in the region.

The regime in Mindanao is characterised by a cohabitation of liberal/formal and illiberal/informal power players. Local rulers who are in control of multiple technologies of power have the indisputable agency to sponsor “hybrid violence” (Krause 2012, 40) or a combination of vertical and horizontal forms of violence. Although the complex mix of multiple sources of power is often referred to in the peacebuilding literature as a “hybrid political order” (Boege, Brown, Clements

⁷ Confidential interview with an officer of the Bangsamoro Development Authority, General Santos City, 19 August 2016.

⁸ On 7 August 2016, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte made public the list of judges, officials of the Philippine National Police and local politicians who are alleged to have an involvement in rampant illegal drug trade in the country. Some of these names are mayors and legislators from the Bangsamoro. For more information, visit <http://www.rappler.com/nation/142210-duterte-list-lgu-police-officials-linked-drugs>.

and Nolan 2009, 599; Adam 2018), I will refer to this phenomenon as a complex political regime to avoid confusion in the use of the term hybrid in this thesis.

4.2 | Nature and geographies of power of the ‘powerful’

This section of the paper pays attention to major groups in the Bangsamoro, who are here identified as ‘the powerful’, and it explains the extent, nature and sources of their powers. To better understand the nebulous idea of power, it is helpful to look at some theoretical propositions on power. The Weberian notion of leadership suggests that power may have multiple manifestations in rational, traditional and charismatic grounds (Weber 1947). Nonetheless, Weber fails to take into consideration the possibility of hybridisation, whereby powerful actors may have different and overlapping sources of power. Actors acquire and exercise power on all three grounds as both formal and informal leaders. The weakness of Weber’s theory on power can be compensated for using the post-structuralist notion of Michel Foucault (1980), which argues that power, as well as the resistance it generates, is diffused and not localised. Power is omnipresent or ubiquitous, which means that it is found everywhere and is constantly produced through discourses and legitimised by institutions (see also Hay 2002). From that standpoint, power may exist and manifest itself even in the marginalised zones of relatively powerless groups. With particular reference to the power map of the Bangsamoro, it is observed that although power is ubiquitous, it is also characterised by asymmetries. In the power spectrum, power tends to converge and form nodes and bubbles in favour of the local strongmen of Mindanao. Unlike other actors, these local rulers have multiple sources of power as they have politico-economic and military resources, including strong relationships with the national political elite in the Philippines (see Mercado 2010). Some of them are in a position to employ threats and intimidation to preserve their status and expand their power over the conflict-stricken people.⁹

The power map of war-affected communities shows the different power holders and players, who largely contribute to the dynamics of conflict and the complications of peace operations in Mindanao as shown in Figure 5. The key feature of the political regime is local authoritarianism as the backdrop to the Philippines national democracy. This is due to the existence of diverging nodes of power, with varying intensities, under the control of different powerful groups and individuals. Obviously, the power map stresses the concentration of a substantial amount of power on the so-called local *bosses*, kingpins, and strongmen (Sidel 1999). They are the biggest power players, who

⁹ Confidential interview with an anonymous human rights investigator, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

each have the capacity to determine the politico-security arrangements in the Bangsamoro. A mix of legal and extra-legal political infrastructures, including government resources and private armies, is at their disposal to realise their interests and preserve their time in power. Mercado (2010, 18) claims that these strongmen, especially the warlords, are able to wield and stay in power because they have “guns, goons and gold.” These guns, goons and gold, in most cases, are the property of the Philippine government. For example, some policemen are also members of private armies of warlords. Warlords turned local politicians have acquired military-grade weapons and artillery for their campaigns of counter insurgency. Some are even in a position to capture the security forces of the state, such as members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the AFP, to protect their regime and their lucrative yet illicit activities, which include the narcotics business (Cagoco-Guam and Schoofs 2013), the kidnap-for-ransom business (Gutierrez 2013), cross-border smuggling of goods (Villanueva 2013), gun running syndicates (Quitoriano 2013; Lara 2010) and illegal gambling (Mercado 2010).

Formal power holders, particularly the local politicians and government bureaucrats, are not the only groups exercising power in the conflict areas. Insurgent organisations such as the MILF and the MNLF occupy another sphere of power in the southern Philippines. Both rebel organisations act as *de facto* governments in their respective territories and strongholds in different localities. The armed group MILF is the biggest rebel organisation, with thousands of *mujahidin* fighters, and is in control of military camps all over the Bangsamoro (Roy and Saha 2016). Most of its major camps are located in the Provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur. Some of these camps, particularly in Maguindanao, are under the command of former MILF commanders who formed part of the splinter group, BIFF. The MNLF, on the other hand, continues to press its demands for independence from the Philippine government. Its centre of command is located in the island Province of Sulu, where its Chairman, Nur Misuari, resides and gives directives to his loyal supporters. Like the MILF, the MNLF has established strongholds in its controlled territories, especially in Sulu and Tawi-tawi.¹⁰ Some of the local politicians, such as the Alontos and Semas (see Table 2) are known leaders of the MNLF (CISAC 2018). Terrorist organisations such as the Abu Sayyaf, Al Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah, Ansar Al-Khalifah Philippines and the Maute Group are likewise operating in the Bangsamoro (see Abuza 2005; Liljas 2016, 14 April). The presence of terrorist and extremist groups threatens the peace operations of the government and other development institutions, including that of NGOs and international organisations.

¹⁰ Confidential interview with a Philippine Navy officer, General Santos City, 2 July 2016.

The intricate political environment in Mindanao constitutes a huge obstacle in attaining the sustainable peace and development that is desired by people and communities who have suffered the brunt of war for decades. The existing power arrangement in the Bangsamoro has enabled local rulers to gain control, influence and powers that are drawn from both traditional and political sources. Nonetheless, there are relatively powerless groups that are vulnerable to protracted armed conflict. These are the people and communities that experienced marginalisation and cyclical exclusion due to poor governance and decades of armed conflict in Mindanao. According to the 2015 Philippines Forced Displacement Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), hundreds of thousands of people in Mindanao have been repeatedly displaced. Among the internally displaced persons (IDPs) are the women and children, who are more prone and vulnerable to violence and have to endure life in the evacuation camps for weeks or even months. Another group of the powerless community that is also prone to armed conflict is that of the indigenous peoples, especially the Tedurays of Upi, Maguindanao and the Monobos between the boundaries of Maguindanao and North Cotabato. As of December 2015, there are around 8,090 displaced indigenous people who are unable to go back to their respective localities due to security problems (UNHCR 2015, 10).

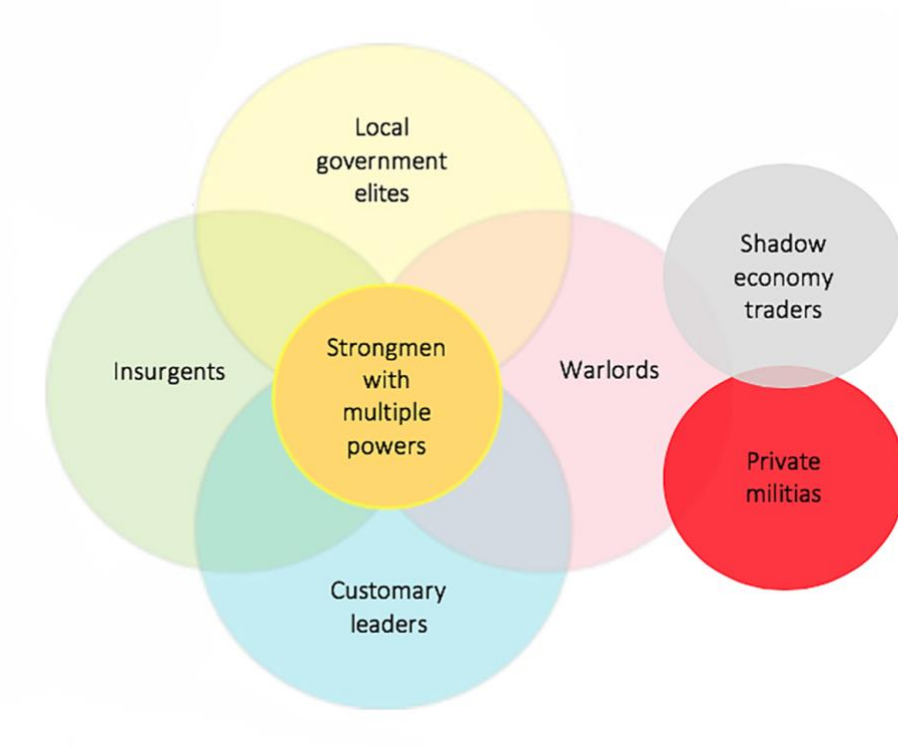
In sum, the political reality in Mindanao that romanticises the dominance of some powerful groups, especially the warlords, is primarily due to the “erosion of state capacity and legitimacy” (Pugh and Copper 2004, 9). Local authoritarianism is prevalent in Mindanao, despite the overarching national democracy in the Philippines. Warlord politics has flourished in Mindanao (and elsewhere in the country) due to the inability and weakness of the Philippine state to install democratic values, particularly development, governance, human rights and rule of law. These strongmen are able to continue perpetuating their power due to the support of national political elite (Lara 2014). Some of the warlords have a *quid pro quo* relationship with the Philippine political elite. Former President Ferdinand E. Marcos is known to have given enormous favours to the late warlord Mohammad Ali Dimaporo in the 1980s (McCoy 2009), while the former President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, had a strong alliance with the Ampatuan clan of Maguindanao (Mercado 2010).

The issues arising from the historical injustices and extreme poverty confronting the Moro people serve as social justification for insurgency. The rise of militant rebel organisations with overwhelming numbers of sympathisers is a major indicator of the weak agency and dwindling legitimacy of the Philippine state in some communities in Mindanao. Belligerent groups, especially the MNLF and MILF have acquired the capacity to challenge the sovereignty of the Philippines

state through a revolutionary armed uprising. They have likewise gained the support of the Islamic world, particularly in Libya, and the member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (Podder 2012). In fact, some of the high-ranking rebel leaders were sent to Libya and Egypt to receive higher education and intensive guerrilla training. To better understand the complex political infrastructure of Mindanao, I will present the following groups and individuals, who are involved in a power game. I will discuss the implications of such power dynamics to the promotion of democracy and the peace operation of NGOs in the Bangsamoro.

Local rulers and their multiple identities

Figure 6. Illustration of strongmen's nature and sources of power



Source: Author's diagram based on fieldwork interview

The greatest portion of formal and informal power belongs to the local political elite in the Bangsamoro. In this research, formal power refers to the authority exercised by actors who are constitutionally elected to hold political posts and those duly appointed to manage administrative positions in the national and local government bureaucracies in the Philippines. Informal power, on the other hand, is understood as the agency of actors to impose authority or exercise control over others by invoking their cultural, religious and traditional claims as customary rulers.

Commanders of different armed groups are deemed informal power holders. Moreover, the employment of fear by the warlords of Mindanao is another type of informal power (Espesor 2017a).

Political power in the southern Philippines is largely monopolised by a few privileged Moro families. Each political clan has its bailiwick in its respective province or municipality. For decades, it has been a political reality in Muslim Mindanao that all members of a single ruling family occupy electoral posts, and these family members are simply rotated through electoral positions. For example, when the patriarch of a clan is no longer eligible to run for re-election as provincial governor due to term limitation, his wife or any of his children may run to replace him in his post and he eventually competes for another electoral position, such as town mayor or member of the House of the Representatives. Polygamy is accepted in Islam and most of the local Muslim politicians in Mindanao are known to have more than one wife. In the case of late Basilan Congressman Wahab Akbar, three of his wives were elected into public office in the May 2016 National Election. Akbar was killed in an explosion at the *Batasang Pambansa* (Philippine National Assembly) in 2008 (Bartolome 2016).

Members of these political clans are not only placed in various political posts, but they also occupy key positions in the local and national bureaucracies of the Philippine government. Hence, the political arena in the Bangsamoro is characterised by the monopoly and hegemony of local political elite, who are successful in wielding almost absolute power and control in their respective territories. However, the Philippine national government remains the most powerful institution. It can employ its military and police power to neutralise rebellion and terrorism in Mindanao and incarcerate political warlords who commit offenses against the law. The arrest and detention of some influential members of the Ampatuan clan as suspected perpetrators of the Maguindanao Massacre is an example of the Philippine state's execution of its power to impose its will in the Bangsamoro. The overwhelming degree of power enjoyed by the local political elite is primarily due to weak regulatory oversight by the central government, which breeds chaos and anarchy in Mindanao. However, the Philippine state has the power to overwhelm any of them, though not to overwhelm all at once, to impose order permanently.

Table 2. List of politically prominent clans in the Bangsamoro

Clans	Land lord	Business elite	War lord	Currently holding political posts	Royal family (datu or sultan)	Affiliation with MILF/ MNLF	With private armed groups
Province of Maguindanao							
Ampatuan	X	X	X	X	x		X
Sinsuat	X	X	x	X	X		X
Mangudadatu	X	X	x	X	x		X
Sema	X	X	x	X		X	X
Midtimbang	x	x		x	X		
Sangki	x		x	x			x
Matalam			x	x	X		X
Pendatun	X	x		x			
Mastura	x		x	x	X		x
Datumanong	x		x			x	X
Paglas	X	X		x			
Piang				x			
Tomawis-Aratuc	x			x	X		
Dilangalen	x	X	x			X	x
Biruar	x	x	x	x	x		X
Province of Lanao del Sur							
Alonto	X	X		X		X	X
Lucman	X			X			X
Adiong	X	X		X			X
Balindong	X			X			X
Papandayan				X			
Dimaporo	X	X	X			X	X
Dipatuan				x			
Island Province of Sulu							
Tan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tulawie	X		X	X			X
Arbison	X	X	X	X			X
Loong	X	X	X		X		X
Amilbangsa	X				X	X	X
Jikiri	X		X	X		X	X
Amin	X	X		X	x	x	X
Burahan	X		X	x			X
Estino	X		X	x		X	X
Ututalum	X		X	X	X	X	X
Sahidula		X	X	X			X
Omar	X	X	X	X	x		X
Hayudini	X	X	X	X		X	X
Island Province of Tawi-tawi							
Sahali	X	X		X		X	X
Jaafar	x	x		X	X	X	X
Matba		X		X		X	
Que	X	X		X			
Island Province of Basilan							
Akbar	X		X	X			X
Hataman	X	X		X		X	X
Salapudin	X		X	X		X	X
Sources:	This list of political families in Maguindanao is drawn from multiple sources, such as data from the Official Gazette of the Philippines and the League of Mayors in the Philippines. Their identities as landlords, warlords, customary leaders, etc. is based on the scholarship of Mercado (2010), McCoy (2009) and validated by the participants of the study from the academe and the military using the Rapid Rural Appraisal approach.						
Note:	The larger the size of 'x', the higher the intensity Clans shaded in green are perceived by the respondents of the study to be more powerful						

As shown in Table 2, the power of political clans in the Bangsamoro emanates from economic, political, military and cultural grounds. Influential Moro politicians not only hold elected posts in the government, but they also belong to affluent families with vast land holdings, and they are owners of various business enterprises. Most of these landed politicians are engaged in lucrative agricultural ventures such as palm oil and banana production. Some of them are the exclusive distributors of the commercial products of big private companies, such as Coca Cola and San Miguel Beer. They also employ thousands of workers in the Bangsamoro, who are expected to deliver votes for their patrons during elections. This is due to a strong culture of clientelism in the Philippines.¹¹ Some of these politicians invoke their customary rights as traditional leaders, which they inherited from their forefathers. As warlords, they have military power, which is manifested through their control of private armies and their capacity to purchase expensive high-powered firearms and ammunition from abroad. According to a confidential source from the Philippine military, each private militia may consist of five to fifty people, who are receiving salaries from warlord politicians. Interestingly, some less powerful politicians at the village level are conscripted into the private armies of the warlord politicians.¹² Dizard, Walker and Tucker (2012, 539) reported that there are 107 private armies in the entire Philippines. In the ARMM, politicians have used private armies to organise electoral violence. In addition, some politicians have close connections in the MILF and MNLF, which can also provide military protection to them.

It is worth noting the fungible nature of power or how power from one source can be converted or transformed into another form of power. An inventory of the different sources of power of Mindanao's warlord politicians allows a deep and rich analysis on the fungibility or evolving character of power. For instance, economic-based power from ownership of agricultural lands and private business can be transformed into political power, as it provides politicians with the means to finance expensive electoral campaigns, including the dubious practice of vote-buying or simply giving away material favours to the voters. The ownership of private armies is a strategic mechanism to force powerless groups to vote for a certain warlord politician, using threat and intimidation. Warlords' affiliations with the rebels can be transformed into political support during elections in rebel-controlled communities. It is also observed that some rebel commanders are elected as village chiefs.¹³

¹¹ For a more elaborate discussion of the patron-client paradigm in the Philippines, see the scholarship of Lande, Carl H. 1966. *Leaders, Factions and Parties: The Structure of Philippine Politics*. Monograph Series No. 6. New Haven: Yale University

¹² Confidential interview with an officer of the Philippine Navy, General Santos City, 2 July 2016.

¹³ Confidential interview with an officer of an international organisation operating in the Bangsamoro, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

Traditional forms of power are likewise useful for customary leaders to reinvent themselves into modern political elite, which is evidenced by Muslim mayors and governors, who claim to be *sultans* and *datu*s. These customary leaders remain politically influential in their respective places. This is due to the existence of a ostensibly feudal social structure in the Bangsamoro, where the poor people continue to submit to the authority of their traditional rulers. In summary, traditional, military and economic power are seen to be fungible in generating political power for the warlord politicians. Moreover, political power is highly fungible. It is crucially important for politicians to protect their status and business interests. They can use government resources to employ people, who will be part of their non-state armed groups (NSAG) or private militias. Having control of politics enables the warlords to insulate and conceal the lucrative illicit shadow economy in the Bangsamoro. In fact, the monopoly of political power is a necessary precondition for the continued proliferation and existence of illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, gun running and smuggling (see Lara and Schoofs 2013; Lara 2014).

Some of these clans (highlighted in green) are perceived to be more powerful and influential than others. They are the well-established families, who are in possession of political machinery and infrastructure, which has allowed them to preserve their term in politics for decades and enabled them to occupy multi-level positions in the government. They also have strong connections and linkages with the political elite in the national government. For the purpose of brevity, I shall focus the discussion on the political clans in the Province of Maguindanao, as it is considered to be a major hotspot of insurgency in the southern Philippines. The Ampatuans, Sinsuats and Mangudadatus are the well-known political dynasties that have substantial control of local politics in Maguindanao Province. However, it should be noted that these political families are interconnected with other clans by blood or marriage. The Datumanongs for instance, are relatives of the Ampatuans, while the Semas have an affinal relationship with the Sinsuats. In fact, the incumbent First District Representative of Maguindanao, Bai Sandra Sema is from the influential Sinsuat clan (see Cayabyab 2016).

Among the three biggest political clans, the Ampatuans have acquired more fame and popularity in the entire Philippines for two major reasons. First, they were in control of almost every area and aspect of the politics of Maguindanao and the ARMM. They were able to wield a tremendous amount of political power due to their strong connection with the former President Gloria-Macapagal Arroyo, who benefitted from the block of votes from Maguindanao in the 2004

Presidential Election (see Mercado 2010). President Arroyo was even perceived as an adopted daughter of the patriarch, Datu Andal Ampatuan Sr. With the staunch support of the Philippine President, Andal Sr served as governor of Maguindanao from 1998-2009 (see Gavilan 2015). His son Zaldy was elected as the ARMM regional governor in 2005 until his arrest and detention in 2009. Other sons of Andal Sr were also elected mayors in their respective towns in Maguindanao. Interestingly, some of the towns in the province, such as the Municipalities of Datu Saudi, Datu Hoffer and Datu Unsay, are named after the sons of the clan's patriarch. At the height of their power as the "overlords" of the ARMM (Lara 2010, 81), they were able to sway the ARMM Regional Assembly to pass local laws which subdivided the old town of Maganoy into four new municipalities. These are the towns of Shariff Aguak, Unsay, Mamasapano and Hoffer (Mercado 2010). Such action of the Ampatuan clan to alter the political subdivisions of the ARMM has been motivated by their family's interest in creating bailiwicks for each son of Andal Sr. Secondly, the Ampatuans are accused and implicated as the primary perpetrators and instigators of the horrendous Maguindanao massacre,¹⁴ where some members of the Mangudadatu family and 32 journalists were slaughtered in the Town of Kauran, Maguindanao on 23 November 2009. Key members of the family, particularly the former ARMM Governor, Zaldy Ampatuan, and the Datu Unsay Mayor, Andal Ampatuan Jr, are currently incarcerated. Their father, Andal Sr, died on 17 July 2015 while the trial was on-going.¹⁵ At the time of writing, the Mangudadatu family have gained control of local politics in Maguindanao since the time when the infamous massacre took place. However, some members of the Ampatuan clan are still in power as political rulers of some towns in Maguindanao.¹⁶

The control and domination of political clans is not exclusive to Maguindanao. Other ARMM provinces are likewise under the dominion of powerful political clans. The Province of Lanao del Sur is a known stronghold of the Alontos, Lucmans, Adiongs and Balindongs. These families have shared consanguine and affinal ties with each other (see Gavilan 2015). It should be noted that the Dimaporos are the political rulers of Lanao del Norte, but their patriarch and known warlord, Mohammad Ali Dimaporo, was appointed provincial governor of Lanao del Sur in 1976 during the martial law government of former President Ferdinand Marcos (Unson 2004).

¹⁴ For more information about the involvement of the Ampatuan clan in the Maguindanao Massacre, visit <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/75689-infographic-5-years-after-maguindanao-massacre>.

¹⁵ For more information about the death of the Andal Ampatuan Sr, visit <http://www.rappler.com/nation/99713-maguindanao-massacre-suspect-andal-ampatuan-sr-dead>.

¹⁶ Interview with a senior professor and anthropologist in the Mindanao State University-General Santos City, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

Political dynasties also exist in the island ARMM Provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-tawi (BASULTA). Like their counterparts in Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, they have perpetuated power for decades by dominating local politics in their respective political spheres. The list of politically prominent families in the Island Province of Sulu provides an interesting observation in that the family of Sultan Jamalul Kiram III, who died in 2013, is no longer perceived as an influential clan. The Kirams no longer hold key local political positions in Sulu. Princess Jacel Kiram failed to get elected in her senatorial bid in the May 2016 National Election (see Legaspi 2016). The Sultanate of Sulu is an interesting case to help understand the process whereby power is lost. The Sultanate preceded both the Philippines and Malaysia as a sovereign state. Its territory was integrated as part of the Philippines when the Americans took control in 1898 from the Spanish, and finalised in the subsequent birth of the Philippine state in 1946. Moreover, the Sultanate's claim over Sabah on the Island of Borneo is not recognised internationally and the area is controlled by Malaysia. Its former rulers, such as Sultan Jamalul Kiram III, who considered himself the poorest sultan in the world, were leaders by title with no real official power from the Philippine government. At the time of writing, no member of the said royal family occupies a powerful political post in the Province of Sulu. They are perceived to be politically irrelevant and their legitimacy as traditional rulers has been overshadowed by the warlord politicians (see Ramos 2013, 21 October).

The list of prominent political clans in the Bangsamoro provides evidence of warlord politics and local state capture in the southern Philippines. Local politicians are in control of government infrastructure and resources, especially the internal revenue allotment (IRA). They have multiple sources of wealth. Most of them are in possession of vast tracts of land in the Bangsamoro. Most of these lands are productively utilised for diversified business ventures, which employ thousands of workers. People employed by the local politicians are expected to return the favour in terms of votes during elections. Hence, patronage politics governs the relationship between the warlords and the people in the Bangsamoro. The patron-client relationship provides legitimacy to the rule of some warlords. The loyal supporters of the Ampatuan clan, for instance, are afforded protection by their private militia from the possible aggression of different rebel groups. The patriarch Andal Sr, when he was still alive, was known for his generosity in financially supporting Muslim families in Maguindanao that were bound for the *haj* or pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Each family received a personal endowment of USD 1,000 from Datu Andal Sr.¹⁷

¹⁷ Interview with a warlord politician in Mindanao, Pasig City, Philippines, 22 November 2017.

Interestingly, strongmen in Mindanao are not only warlord political leaders and landed elite. Some are recognised customary rulers as *datu* or *sultan* by rights and blood in their traditional domain or fiefdom. Royal families, such as the Mastura (McCoy 2009), Sinsuat, Matalam, Midtimbang, and Tomawis-Aratuc, have customary claims to the Sultanate of Maguindanao as descendants of Sultan Kudarat. *Datuism* in Mindanao is widely practiced even today, based on “*agama*” and customary law (see Mercado 2010, 20). Other clans, such as the Ampatuan and Mangudadatu, likewise claim to be of royal blood but lesser degree. Moreover, political families in the ARMM are all Muslims. They invoke their customary right as rulers, which is allowed under the Islamic faith. Having political leaders of royal descent is deeply embedded in the identity of Muslims in Mindanao (McKenna 1998).

According to Reno (1999, 80), a distinguishing feature of “warlordism” is the employment of violent force to eliminate or neutralise opponents and to accumulate wealth exclusively from illicit economies. Kreuzer (2005) asserts that the local political landscape of Mindanao, even before the advent of the Moro insurgency, had been characterised by political violence courtesy of warring clans. *Rido* or clan warfare is the usual driver of horizontal conflict in Mindanao (see Torres 2007). Actors like the warlords of Mindanao may aggravate internal conflicts because of their capacity to accumulate weapons and other resources through the use of their transnational trading networks (see Pugh and Cooper 2004). In Mindanao, the local strongmen own private militias. These paramilitaries include the CVO and CAFGU. The members of the paramilitary units can be seen in Mindanao wearing uniforms of the state security. The control and possession of private armies by local rulers has been permitted by the Philippine state to some degree in order to counter Moro rebels and curtail communist insurgency.¹⁸ However, these private armies are also used to eliminate political enemies (Mercado 2010). For example, the Maguindanao Massacre was carried out by the NSAG of the Ampatuans against their rival, the Mangudadatus (Santos 2014). Moreover, the ownership of private armies seems to be a non-negotiable security investment among local politicians to ensure their safety and the survival of their regimes.

Francisco Lara of the London School of Economics and the International Alert asserts that the warlord families have “corrosive power” (2010, 79), and that is detrimental to the promotion of democracy and the attainment of peace in Mindanao. He claimed that the warlords in Mindanao have stockpiles of arms and ammunition and that, therefore, they have the ability to inflict violence

¹⁸ Interview with an academic in the Ateneo De Davao University, Davao City, 19 January 2018.

against the rebels or their political enemies. Lara is also bold in exposing the involvement of these violent clans in the lucrative trade in illegal weapons and narcotics in Southeast Asia, which according to him, is “a new source of politico-economic power that explains the resilience of warlord clans” (2010, 79). He added that these clans have gained access to the development aid and assistance for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-torn communities in Mindanao. Foreign aid has become a significant element of war economies in Mindanao, which is sometimes captured or hijacked by the local political elite.¹⁹

A controversial assertion made in this study is that NGOs, which are agents of liberalism, are reinforcing illiberal norms and values, particularly patronage and clientelism, as traditional rulers, and local bosses tend to maintain support through patron-client relations by giving out largesse to their clients, especially the poor and war-stricken people in the Bangsamoro. This study reveals that there are some NGOs in Mindanao that are reinforcing the existence of patron-client ties in distributing their resources. This means that they allow the local bosses to influence their operations on how, where and to whom projects should be directed.²⁰ In most instances, the local bosses or strongmen manage to take credit for NGOs’ initiatives and efforts in the conflict zones. These local power players tend to claim ownership over NGOs and other aid-funded projects. It is relatively easy for the strongmen to capture NGO projects, as the ordinary people at the grassroots are not really aware of the identities of these NGOs and their donors. In most cases, local politicians include NGO projects as their accomplishments with the justification that the NGOs are only able to deliver services in their localities because they authorised it or because bringing NGOs into their towns is an outcome of their initiative. This finding was documented when the World Bank conducted a spot-checking study of the ARMM Social Fund Projects in 2013.²¹ A good number of respondents said that the various projects under the ARMM Social Fund were from their local politicians. Hence, this implies that NGOs have the good intention of helping the impoverished people in conflict-ridden communities, but they are unable to alter the complex political and social arrangements in the Bangsamoro. Consequently, they rather reinforce the patron-client and boss-led social structures in the conflict zone. (See Chapter Five for further discussion on this issue.)

¹⁹ Interview with a senior professor and anthropologist in the Mindanao State University-General Santos City, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

²⁰ Interview with a country director of an international NGO, Pasig City, 11 August 2016.

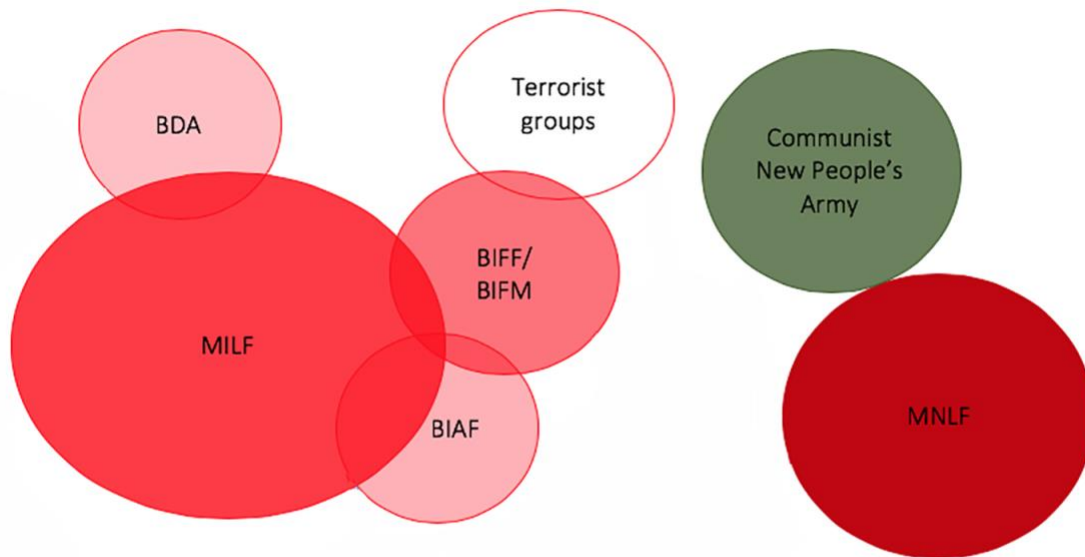
²¹ I was involved in this study as a data analyst.

Lastly, Table 2 shows that some of these prominent political elite have affiliations with the rebel organisations. When the Philippine government signed the 1996 Final Peace Agreement (FPA) with the MNLF, some of its leaders vied for and won electoral positions, for instance, the former MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, who became the regional governor of the ARMM from 1996 to 2001 (CISAC, 2018). At present, the Semas and Alontos, who are key leaders of the MNLF, occupy elected posts in Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao and Cotabato City. The affiliation of the politicians with the rebel organisations is evident in the BASULTA island provinces, which are known bailiwicks of the MNLF. However, a direct affiliation of local political elite with the MILF cannot be established. Some local political elite, such as the Ampatuans, have a hostile relationship with the MILF. MILF Vice-chair Gazhali Jaafar said in an interview that the local politicians, who have dynasties and a monopoly of political power in the Bangsamoro, are the reason for the ineffective government and extreme impoverishment experienced by the Moro people. He blames the central government for tolerating the local Moro politicians' seemingly exclusive franchise of political power in the southern Philippines.²² As a revolutionary organisation, MILF does not recognise the legitimacy of local politicians and its supporters do not participate in any democratic exercise, especially elections. This is particularly true in communities that are known as MILF strongholds, which receive directives from the Central Committee in Camp Darapanan in Maguindanao. However, the behaviour of the MILF towards democracy might change as a result of the organisation of the UBJP after the signing of the CAB in 2014 (see Manlupig 2014). The UBJP is the political party of the MILF that is expected to vie for political power in an election. This is expected to happen because President Duterte signed the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) that will put into effect the CAB (see Adam 2018).

²² Interview, Pigkalagan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, 22 July 2016.

Insurgents and terrorist groups

Figure 7. Illustration of belligerent and terrorist organisations in Mindanao

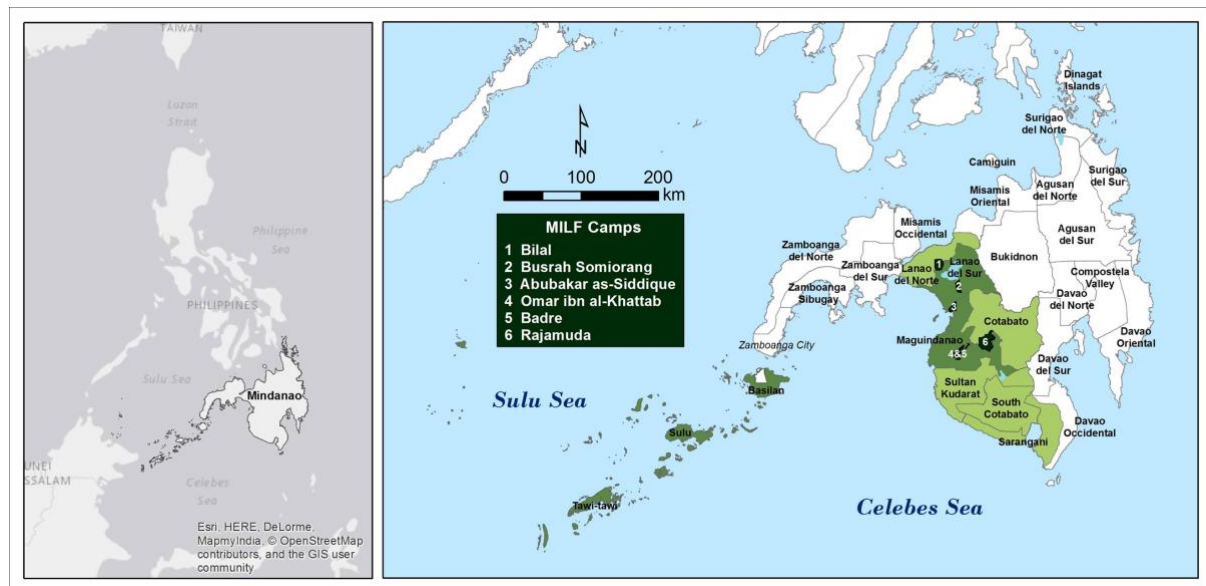


Source: Author's diagram based on fieldwork interviews

Insurgent groups, such as the MNLF and MILF, have established communities in different localities in the southern Philippines. Both rebel organisations have military camps, not only in the mainland provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, but also in the island provinces of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. In their stronghold communities, both rebel groups have created a parallel system of governance using their civilian structure of government. People in these communities pay allegiance to the *de facto* governments established by these insurgent organisations. The loyalty of the people of the Bangsamoro towards the rebel organisations is rooted in their desire for self-determination and recognition of the Moro nation within the Philippine state.²³

²³ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

Figure 8. Map showing the location of the six major MILF camps



Sources: Bangsamoro Development Authority and Armed Forces of the Philippines

Note: *This map is original to this study, which is generated through use of Arc GIS software. The list of MILF major camps is based on the information from the BDA and the 2012 FAB-Annex on Normalisation, while the actual location of these camps is from a confidential informant inside the AFP.*

As shown in the map (Figure 8), the MILF has six major camps across the Bangsamoro. They are not mere training camps, where members of the BIAF are stationed, but communities of loyal supporters and sympathisers of the MILF. Camp Abubakar as-Siddique, located in the Matanog, Maguindanao, used to be the biggest MILF stronghold, but it was destroyed during the all-out war against the movement declared by former President Joseph Estrada on 21 March 2000 (see Melican 2015). The largest camp of the MILF in Lanao del Sur is Busrah Somiorang in the town of Butig. The Municipality of Talayan in Maguindanao hosts two major MILF camps. It is interesting to note that Camp Badre is located inside the perimeter zone of Camp Omar ibn al-Khattab. Some camps are situated on the boundary between two provinces. Camp Bilal, in the town of Munai, has an area that overlaps Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, while Camp Rajamuda in Pikit, North Cotabato, extends in breadth up to Maguindanao.²⁴ In addition to these six major camps, the MILF has twenty-five satellite camps all over Mindanao, including its headquarters and centre of government, Camp Darapanan in Maguindanao.²⁵ In these localities the MILF is perceived as the

²⁴ The location of the six MILF camps is based on confidential interviews, General Santos City, 2 July 2016.

²⁵ Confidential interview with an officer of the Bangsamoro Development Authority, General Santos City, 19 August 2016.

official government, with authority to implement law and order, executed through its ground commanders.

An absentee government and poor delivery of basic social services by mandated agencies of the Philippine state are evident in the Bangsamoro. Most local chief executives, particularly mayors, are not visible in their respective towns. They usually reside in nearby Christian communities in the cities of Koronadal, Tacurong and Davao. These politicians usually live in much safer communities because of permanent danger in their own towns. If they were to live in their own localities, they would be faced with the constant threat of being killed or ambushed by lawless groups or their political opponents.²⁶

Government bureaucracies are effectively dysfunctional in most places in the Bangsamoro. For instance, newly constructed municipal halls in the Province of Maguindanao are like white elephants because most employees who work in the local government units (LGU) are nowhere to be found, even during office hours. This depressing reality in most LGUs in the Bangsamoro is detrimental to the welfare of ordinary citizens. Poor people are unable to receive social services that are supposed to be provided by local government. They also encounter difficulties in obtaining official documents, such as birth certificates, because the people in charge are usually absent from the municipal hall. This scenario of dysfunctional governance seems to extend across the Bangsamoro.²⁷

The absence of effective government and the dysfunctional service-delivery institutions in the Bangsamoro provide favourable conditions for rebel organisations to earn the support and loyalty of ordinary people, especially those from the grassroots. The presence and governance system of the rebel groups makes a greater impression on people than that of official state institutions. For instance, the Moro people in Maguindanao follow the directives and orders of the Central Committee of the MILF, which are disseminated through local commanders assigned to each community. During this research, I found that the reason some people in Maguindanao do not use aid, especially medicines provided by the NGOs and donor organisations, is that medicines and palm oil that are given to conflict-stricken communities are being thrown away or converted into cash by being sold in the local market. The recipients of aid goods are suspicious of the

²⁶ Interview with a sociology professor in the Mindanao State University, General Santos City, and member of the Independent Decommissioning Body, General Santos City, 7 August 2016.

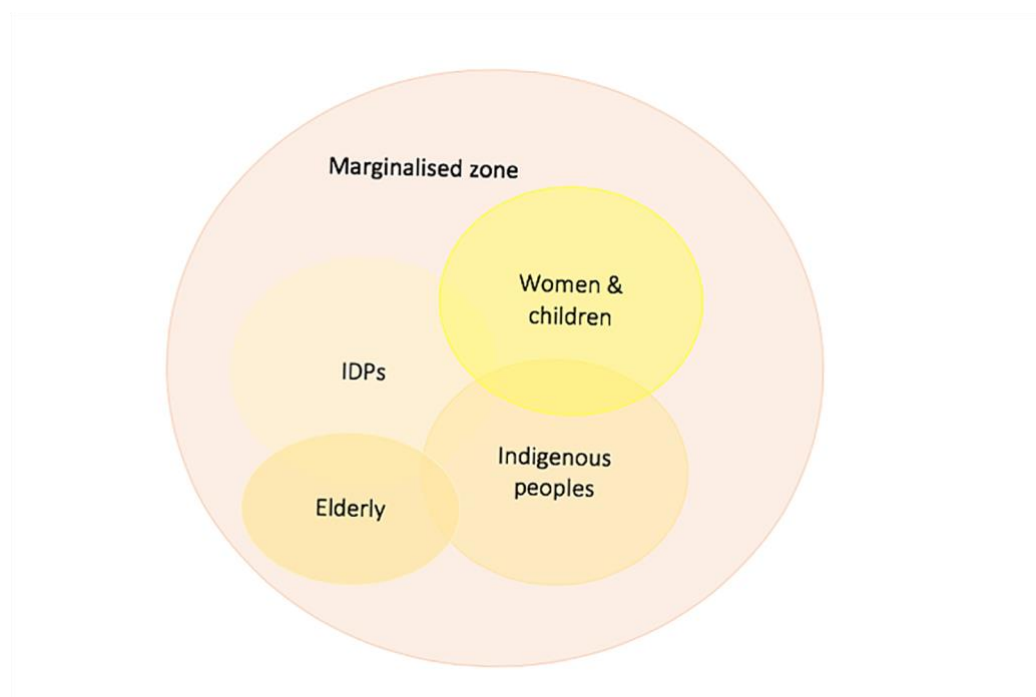
²⁷ The author personally witnessed absentee government in the Bangsamoro in his capacity as a university lecturer and development worker while conducting research projects in the Bangsamoro.

content of these medicines and cooking oils. Some believe that they are contaminated with pork and mind-altering substances.

The recipients' negative perception of aid commodities is probably due to lack of social preparation and public education by the NGOs and aid agencies during their intervention in war-ravaged communities. However, according to a Moro leader who is deeply involved in peacebuilding in Mindanao and who has worked closely with the MILF, people are instructed by local commanders not to utilise aid commodities, especially medicines and cooking oils, because these are *haram*, or forbidden in Islam.²⁸ This finding was also confirmed by two public school teachers in Maguindanao, who are involved in the distribution of relief goods in their respective municipalities.²⁹ This scenario serves to show the extent of the MILF's power and influence over communities in which they have established a presence.

Marginalised communities and poor people

Figure 9. Illustration of the marginalised zone in the Bangsamoro



Source: Author's diagram based on fieldwork interviews

²⁸ Interview with a woman Moro leader and consultant of an international NGO in the Bangsamoro, General Santos City, 30 July 2016.

²⁹ Interviews with two anonymous public school teachers in the Province of Maguindanao, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

The power map shows powerful groups in the war-ravaged communities of Mindanao. It also includes the groups that have been marginalised and made subordinate by protracted armed conflict and dysfunctional governance. The Moro and indigenous peoples have not only accepted war as part of their day-to-day reality, but they are also suffering from extreme poverty. Economic development appears slow in areas marred by violent conflict. Businessmen are reluctant to invest in these insecure and volatile parts of Mindanao, so the people in the Bangsamoro have limited opportunity to engage in productive employment, because there are very few business establishments. The Moro and indigenous peoples rely on subsistence farming and fishing as their primary sources of income. However, they cannot engage in long-term productive activities due to intermittent outbreaks of war (see Cagoco-Guiam 2013). For example, the JCCCH reported a total of 333 armed skirmishes between the security forces of the Philippine government and the MILF in 2008 to 2009 during the breakdown of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD), which meant that armed encounters in the Bangsamoro were taking place almost once a day.³⁰ The JCCCH estimated that around 600,000 civilians were displaced due to the series of armed confrontations following the collapse of the peace negotiation between the government and the MILF in 2008.³¹ Dizard, Walker and Tucker (2012, 543) reported that skirmishes following the collapse of the MOA-AD resulted in the death of 400 people and the displacement of 700,000 civilians. Around 60,000 of them remain displaced. Most groups vulnerable to displacement and violence are poor and marginalised groups, especially women and children, and indigenous people.³²

As shown in Table 3, the provinces in the Bangsamoro are among the poorest in the Philippines. The average poverty incidence in the region is 52.54%, which is considerably higher than the national poverty rate of the Philippines, which is pegged at 24.9%. The 2012 report of the Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA) on the average poverty rate in the ARMM is lower, at 43.2%, while the national poverty incidence is 19.7%. The Provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur are near the bottom, with a poverty index of around 70%. Although the island Province of Tawi-tawi has the lowest poverty rate of 34.11% among all provinces in the Bangsamoro, it is still nearly

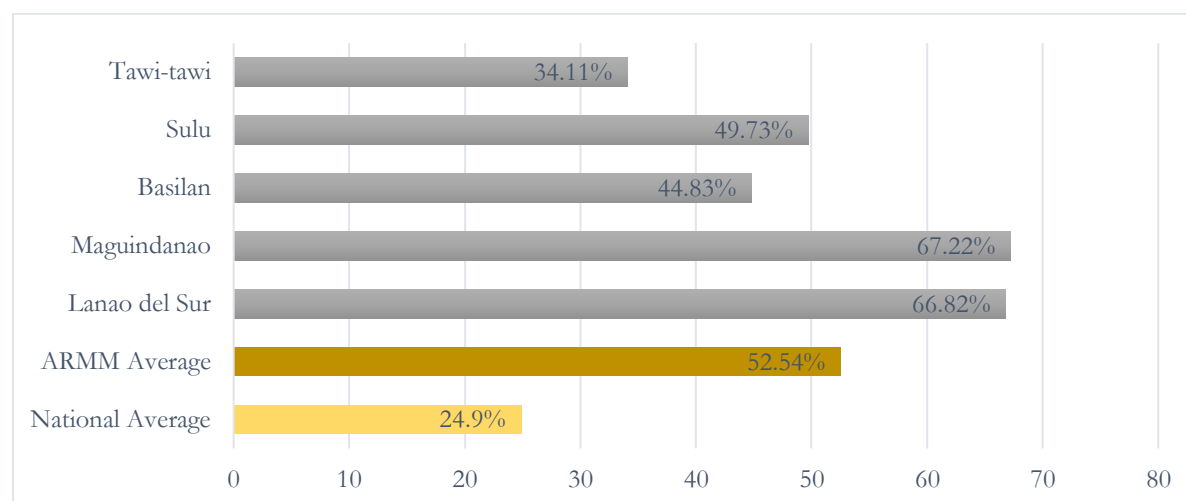
³⁰ Eight among 15 justices of the Supreme Court of the Philippines voted against the constitutionality of the MOA-AD on 14 October 2008. The ruling of the Supreme Court signalled the collapsed of the peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF. For more information on the MOA, visit the website of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, at http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_15591-1522-2-30.pdf?090130094159.

³¹ This report was presented at the Titayan: Bridging for Peace Workshop of the Al-Qalam Institute of Ateneo de Davao University, Davao City, 21 April 2016. For more information about the report of the JCCCH, visit the official website of Ateneo de Davao University at <http://www.addu.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CCCH.presentation.pdf>.

³² Interview with a tribal chieftain of the Arumanen-Manobo, Davao City, 24 April 2016.

double the national average. The severity of poverty and the deplorable state of human capital in the Bangsamoro is aggravated by intermittent armed fighting among warring forces and the seeming inability of state institutions, particularly local government agencies, to provide social and economic protection to people affected by war.

Table 3. Percentage of poverty incidence in the Bangsamoro



Source: Small Area Estimates, National Statistical Coordination Board (2012)

Table 4. Top ten Philippine provinces with lowest Human Development Index (HDI)
(as of 2009)

HDI Rank		Province	HDI	Life expectancy index	Education index	Income index
1997	2009					
66	70	Lanao del Sur	0.416	0.628	0.782	0.146
77	71	Masbate	0.406	0.745	0.754	0.119
43	72	Zamboanga del Norte	0.384	0.837	0.717	0.094
72	73	Sarangani	0.371	0.812	0.655	0.096
56	74	Davao Oriental	0.356	0.812	0.689	0.081
73	75	Agusan del Sur	0.354	0.725	0.765	0.080
22	76	Zamboanga Sibugay	0.353	0.780	0.775	0.073
36	77	Tawi-tawi	0.310	0.532	0.716	0.078
69	78	Maguindanao	0.300	0.610	0.667	0.066
79	79	Sulu	0.266	0.582	0.601	0.054

Source: Philippine Human Development Report, UNDP (2013)

The reports of the National Statistical Coordination Board and the PSA in 2012 on the high poverty incidence in the ARMM are corroborated by the 2013 Philippine Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Table 4 shows that four ARMM

Provinces – Lanao del Sur, Tawi-tawi, Maguindanao and Sulu – are in the bottom ten in terms of HDI, based on the 2009 data released in 2013 by the UNDP. The Provinces of Taw-tawi, Maguindanao and Sulu are at the bottom in terms of HDI.³³ Basilan is the only ARMM province that is not included in the bottom ten. All provinces on the list, except Masbate, are in Mindanao. This figure shows that the people in most ARMM provinces are saddled with abject poverty and indicates the lack of financial capacity among the poor.

The groups of women and their children and indigenous people are the frequent victims of war-induced displacement and deprivation.

Women and children in armed conflict situations

Women and children are among the groups most affected by the intractable armed conflict in the southern Philippines. At the outbreak of war, women and their children have to run for their lives and have usually fled to the camps as evacuees. When there is an outbreak of hostilities, it is common in Mindanao to see big dump trucks, owned by the government and some private organisations, fully loaded with the elderly, women and children, who are bound for different evacuation centres. These people, who are displaced by war, are usually accommodated in various evacuation camps, municipal gymnasiums and public school buildings. Government agencies and NGOs set up temporary shelters for people who have been displaced by war. Some of them go to neighbouring towns and seek refuge with their relatives, while the skirmishes are on-going in their respective *barangays*. By visiting and observing the situations in different evacuation centres, one may notice immediately that the majority of the refugees are women and their children. It is rare to see adult men, except elderly men, in the evacuation camps. Men, who are members of the guerrilla forces, particularly in the Muslim majority areas, usually hide in the jungle and fight the members of the state security forces. The absence of men in the evacuation camps is also documented in other war-prone societies, for instance in Chad in Africa (Lisher 2007).

While in a state of displacement, women have to deal with the difficult and challenging situation of meeting their physical and biological needs. The usual problem confronting refugees, especially women, is how to get access to clean and potable water. Poor sanitation, due to limited or lack of water in most evacuation sites, is a pressing concern faced by a conflict-displaced population.

³³ The UNDP (2013, 60) defines HDI as “a summary measure of human development, computed using the average achievement in three basic dimensions: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living.” The ideal index is 1.

Public facilities, such as toilets, are also very limited in catering to the needs of thousands of people confined in evacuation centres. Moreover, women, especially mothers, have to take the responsibility of providing for the daily needs of their children, such as food and clothing, as their husbands do not usually stay in the evacuation camps. The agency of women to take care of the needs of the family, especially their children, only shows that they can exercise power or agency despite difficult situations. Power in this context is seen in the resourcefulness and innovation shown by women while living in the evacuation centres. They usually engage with government agencies, NGOs and humanitarian organisations to access relief assistance for their families. Some women are observed to have small businesses: selling goods within the evacuation camps to generate income.

Children in the Bangsamoro, despite their youth and innocence, have to endure the horrors brought about by war. A major consequence of sporadic conflict is the dwindling quality of human capital in the Bangsamoro, especially in the areas of education, health and nutrition (see Table 4). Poverty among children has been a major outcome of armed conflict. Children are the most vulnerable among all groups affected by violent skirmishes between warring parties. The lack of necessary support and weak mechanisms for the protection of children in the Bangsamoro is very concerning. According to the Operations Officer of United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), "children [are] a soft service, [they are] not palatable to the local government officials."³⁴ This only means that most local political leaders do not give priority to the allocation of resources for programmes that seek to protect and promote the welfare of children affected by war. It is not surprising that the education sector in the ARMM has been riddled with issues, particularly of rampant corruption, such as the existence of ghost teachers, ghost students and even ghost schools.³⁵

The vulnerability of children to ailments, especially water-borne diseases, is higher when they are living in evacuation camps. They are likewise exposed to witness physical violence and they experience psychological trauma as a consequence. Interestingly, children in war-prone communities have learned where to run and hide whenever there is an outbreak of hostilities. The classrooms of various public schools have been the usual hiding place for children, women, and the elderly, whenever there are armed confrontations or military operations in their communities. Owing to their constant exposure to violence, the people in the conflict zones have acquired

³⁴ Interview, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

³⁵ Interview with a local NGO leader in the Bangsamoro, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

survival skills during war. They are very much aware that government facilities, such as school buildings, municipal halls and health centres, are the safest places to seek refuge during war. These public facilities are not the usual targets of military offensives, particularly air strikes and the use of deadly artillery, such as Howitzer cannons and 105 mortars, against the rebels. Hence, people in the conflict zone have learned over time that government buildings provide safe havens for them during outbreaks of hostilities. They are also aware that the rebel troops are not likely to attack these public facilities, which give safe shelter to their civilian relatives.³⁶

Another alarming phenomenon confronting children in an environment of armed conflict is their enlistment as combatants by various armed groups. The MNLF, MILF and BIFM/BIFF recruit child soldiers to become *mujahidin* or warriors of God. Most of them do not carry firearms nor directly engage in battles, but they perform other tasks in the camps, such as production of ammunition and cleaning of guns. Children whose parents are members or sympathisers of the rebel organisations are potentially mobilised as child soldiers (Cagoco-Guiam 2002). Sons and, in some cases, daughters of commanders and fighters of the guerrilla groups are even more likely to be recruited and enlisted as *mujahidin* and *mujahidat* (women fighters). The carrying and use of firearms is not new to these children. They grow up in an environment, especially within their families, where their fathers, brothers, and relatives are in possession of weapons and have sufficient military training to engage in battles with the security forces of the Philippine government.³⁷ Thus, these children have been socially accustomed to the fact that having guns and ammunition is a normal part of their lives. In fact, it is a common scene in various communities in the southern Philippines that civilians carry high-calibre weapons, such as M16 rifles on their shoulders, even in broad daylight.

Indigenous cultural communities and armed conflict

Aside from the Muslims in the southern Philippines, the indigenous peoples who are native inhabitants of Mindanao are heavily affected by the longstanding armed conflict. These vulnerable groups constitute the ethnic minorities in the region. They are also exposed to frequent displacement owing to intermittent conflicts in their respective communities. According to a 2014 study conducted by a German NGO, KAS, and its southern NGO partner, the IAG, the indigenous peoples in the Provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur are pushing for the

³⁶ Interviews of two anonymous public school teachers in the Province of Maguindanao, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

³⁷ Interview with a senior professor and anthropologist in the Mindanao State University, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

recognition of their right to self-determination by asserting their unique identity, which is different from the Moro people and Christian inhabitants of Mindanao. However, these indigenous peoples, unlike the Moro, do not have the capacity to demand recognition through an armed movement like the MILF and the MNLF. Instead, they have not only been marginalised, but they have also been subordinated by the protracted armed conflict that has ravaged their communities for more than four decades. Displacement and hunger have become a day-to-day reality among members of indigenous cultural communities in times of war. In addition, the frequent armed confrontations between the AFP and the BIAF and the BIFF have become a regular part of their lives.³⁸ These minority groups do not have the option of controlling the situation in their communities. They need to be prepared at all times to vacate their houses and flee to the nearest evacuation centres designated by the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the LGUs. Hence, it has been observed that the indigenous peoples in the Bangsamoro are the most vulnerable to the devastating impacts of armed conflict. This situation has facilitated an internalised sense of powerlessness among members of these groups owing to their inability to control the precarious security situations in their localities.

³⁸ Interview with a tribal chieftain of the Arumanen-Manobo, Davao City, 24 April 2016.

Table 5. The population of indigenous people in mainland ARMM³⁹

#	Ethnic affiliation	No. of household	No. of IP spouse	Other members of the household		Total
				Male	Female	
1	Teduray	14,563	14,688	42,512	38,796	110,559
2	Lambangian	480	468	1,179	1,012	3,139
3	Dulangan Manobo	383	409	1,070	1,042	2,904
4	Higaonon	24	23	63	51	161
5	Agusan Manobo	13	22	28	30	93
6	Blaan	10	5	25	17	57
7	Subanen	8	3	23	20	54
8	T'boli	7	5	19	14	45
9	Tigwahawon	5	5	16	17	43
10	Talaandig	4	10	11	4	29
11	Umayamnon	3	4	12	6	25
12	Mandaya	2	4	3	6	15
13	Bagobo	2	4	4	3	13
14	Pulangihon	1	2	4	3	10
15	Matigsalug	1	1	3	2	7
16	Ilyanun	0	1	0	0	1
17	Dyangan (Klata)	0	1	0	0	1
18	Igorot	3	1	11	6	21
19	Mangyan	1	1	4	3	9
20	Ivatan	0	2	0	0	2
21	Tingguian	0	1	0	0	1
Total		15,510	15,660	44,987	41,032	117,189

Source: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2014, 8)

As shown in Table 5, in the Provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, there are 117,189 indigenous people, who belong to different ethno-linguistic groups. These groups constitute around three percent of the total population of the ARMM, which is 3,781,387 (PSA 2015). The biggest group is the Teduray with a population of 110,559, so the Teduray is the dominant group in terms of population. The Lambangian and Dulangan-Manobo have a combined population of more than 6,000, which is small compared to the Teduray. Most of these people are living in the town of Upi, in the Province of Maguindanao. However, it should be noted that other indigenous peoples living on the borders of the ARMM, Sultan Kudarat and North Cotabato Provinces, have also been affected by armed conflict since its onset in the 1970s. The Arumanen, a branch of the Manobo tribe in the town of Carmen in North Cotabato, for instance, have endured the detrimental effects of war on their lives, just like other indigenous cultural communities within the

³⁹ Based on the Indigenous People population survey, conducted in 2013, in 80 barangays of the 12 municipalities with sizeable numbers of indigenous people in the Provinces of Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur for the IPDEV Project of the KAS in partnership with the IAG and Development Consultants Incorporated. IPDEV was funded by the European Union.

ARMM.⁴⁰ In 2015, the UNHCR reported that 3,154 IP families in south-central Mindanao have experienced displacement and human rights violations due to large scale military operations and retaliatory assaults of various NSAGs in their communities.

4.3 | NGOs and their mechanisms for engagement with multiple actors

Development NGOs that are implementing peace-oriented programmes in Mindanao require a certain amount of political skill. Such skill enables them to manoeuvre the intricate power relations in different localities in the southern Philippines. It is an imperative for them to identify the actors and their extent of power in conflict-prone communities. By doing this, they can devise mechanisms of how to approach these players and solicit their involvement in the implementation of the projects. Even a simple consent or approval coming from these actors for NGOs to enter and operate in the communities is a necessary condition for them to initiate peacebuilding work. Without the support and consent of powerful actors in the conflict areas, NGO involvement in peace operations would be virtually impossible.

The execution of projects on the ground without approval from powerful individuals would represent grave danger to the people working for the NGOs. They might be prohibited from entering, or forced to abandon, communities due to threats and intimidation from these powerful players. Hence, it is important for NGOs to include power analysis in the conceptualisation, formulation and implementation of their peace and development projects in war-ridden communities. This would equip them with the capacity to manage and engage with different power players in the conflict zones.⁴¹ In this section, I discuss and explain the variety of mechanisms employed by development and peacebuilding NGOs in dealing with the formal and informal power holders in the Bangsamoro. Moreover, I also discuss and analyse the dilemmas and predicaments of NGOs operating in this perilous environment.

Engaging with the political elite

There are several ways in which NGOs engage with local politicians in the southern Philippines. NGOs are able to utilise both formal and informal mechanisms in dealing with political and customary rulers in the Bangsamoro. Based on interviews, I discovered that these NGOs

⁴⁰ Interview with a tribal chieftain of the Arumanen-Manobo, Davao City, 24 April 2016.

⁴¹ Confidential interview, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

employed different engagement mechanisms in negotiating with local rulers with multiple sources of power. These mechanisms include the following:

Taking advantage of the invited spaces in local governance

The legal environment in the Philippines has enabled NGOs to take advantage of the available opportunities for participation in the so-called “invited spaces” (see Gaventa 2006, 26) in local governance. The Republic Act No. 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991, mandated the inclusion of CSOs and NGOs in different local special bodies and development councils of the provincial, city, municipal and barangay governments in the Philippines. These local special bodies would include the local health board, the local school board, the local peace and order council and the local development council. The participation of CSOs and NGOs in these local special bodies and councils is aimed at promoting good governance by reinforcing transparency and accountability in all government transactions and processes. This is also an opportunity for NGOs to offer their alternative service and expertise to the LGUs to boost the quality of their delivery of social services at the local level. In addition, it helps to address the issue of the overlapping of functions and redundancy of development initiatives between the LGUs and NGOs. This arrangement is vital to avoid unnecessary competition and, in this way,, governance is a shared responsibility among local government officials and NGOs.

In order for NGOs to participate in the decision-making processes of different special bodies and councils, they need to seek accreditation from the local *sanggunian* or legislative body of the LGU. They are required to submit documents to the local *sanggunian* that can prove their legal identities and track records in socio-economic community development. These documents would include registration papers from various government agencies, such as the Philippines Securities and Exchange Commission (*henceforth* SEC), the Cooperative Development Authority, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Agriculture and the like. In the absence of such accreditation from the LGUs, NGOs and other CSOs are not allowed to have representation in local special bodies and development councils. On the other hand, these local special bodies and development councils cannot be legally constituted without the participation of representatives from CSOs and NGOs. In localities, wherein no or very few NGOs are operating, representation on these bodies and councils comes from People’s Organisations (PO) (Silliman and Noble 1998). According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2007), POs are mainly made up of poor people from the grassroots, who work in a voluntary capacity to advance the interests of their members. In the Philippines, groups such as the fishermen and farmers normally establish their own POs.

The social value and involvement in governance of CSOs and NGOs are provided for in the 1987 Philippine Constitution⁴² and its enabling statute, the LGC of 1991, specifically Article 64 of its Implementing Rules and Regulations. However, having sufficient legal provisions does not constitute a guarantee for NGOs to carry out their social mandates as development partners with the government, especially in the Bangsamoro. Not all NGOs can gain access to their local governance system. Local officials, especially the mayors and members of the local *sanggunian*, can choose which NGOs can have representatives in the local special bodies and development councils. The accreditation requirements from the local *sanggunian* can be used as a mechanism for both inclusion and exclusion. In some cases, only those NGOs chosen by the mayors will have the opportunity to become members of any of the local special bodies and councils. Those that are critical and unfriendly to the local officials are typically excluded in the process.⁴³ Even those NGOs that are accredited by the LGUs to participate in local special bodies and development councils do not often make meaningful and significant contributions to governance. They do not have strong voices within these bodies and councils. It has been observed that it is always the development priorities and preferences of the local chief executives (LCE)⁴⁴ that prevail during deliberation, especially in the approval of the Annual Investment Plan⁴⁵ of LGUs. Moreover, the creation of local special bodies and development councils by the LGUs in the Bangsamoro is a mere formality as compliance with the requirements of the Department of the Interior and Local Government. This is also true in other parts of the Philippines, where there is no armed conflict. Orbista found, in his 2012 study of the participation of NGOs in local governance in the Philippines, that the NGOs do not have significant participation in basic policy-making processes in the LGU because local special bodies do not hold mandated meetings on a regular basis. It may also appear that joining these local special bodies subtly compels NGOs to agree to conditions and rules set by the major power players in local governance.

Relationship-building with the local political elite

Relating with local politicians is a crucial skill that people working in the social development sector, particularly NGOs, must learn and master. In most cases, local officials, especially the mayors, act

⁴² See Article 2, Section 23 and Article 1, Sections 15-16.

⁴³ Interview with a local NGO leader in the Bangsamoro, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

⁴⁴ Interview with a public health physician in Maguindanao, General Santos City, 24 July 2016.

⁴⁵ The AIP is the yearly development plans of all LGUs in the Philippines, which contains a list of projects that are funded by local revenues, particularly the IRA.

as local strongmen or bosses in their respective territories.⁴⁶ NGOs need to project an image that they are not hostile to the political interests of these local bosses and that their presence in the domain of local strongmen is not detrimental to the image and interests of local bosses. It is important for NGOs to focus on relationship-building with the different groups of power players. They are careful not to be perceived as enemies of these local actors: otherwise it would be hard for them to participate in local governance or even to enter the territorial jurisdictions of these local officials to provide services to poor people.⁴⁷ Having both a positive perception of local politicians and a harmonious relationship with them also provides another layer of protection from violence for NGOs.

Some NGOs are not appealing or desirable to the LCEs. They mainly uncover social problems in the localities and connect them to poor governance. This kind of unbeneficial approach used by NGOs does not motivate LCEs to partner with them or grant permission for them to operate in their respective territories. Therefore, with this type of arrangement between the local officials and the NGOs, it would be difficult for the latter to critique the nature of leadership and public management of the former. NGOs cannot simply challenge the government to improve the quality of social services of the LGU, as they might antagonise these local political elite. Hence, the best thing for NGOs to do in this kind of political environment is to complement and assist the service delivery agencies of the LGUs. In this way, NGOs can implement social development and peacebuilding projects in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao without provoking the ire and distrust of local officials.

Finding political champions for NGOs to engage in governance

The intricacy of the social structure due to the dominance of local political elite is shaping the democratic behaviour of NGOs in the Bangsamoro. As part of civil society, NGOs are expected not only to serve as alternative service providers, but also to challenge the government to become more transparent and accountable to people, as well as more responsive to their needs. However, the reality in the Bangsamoro is that the local elite, especially the mayors, orchestrate everything related to politics and administration in their respective political domains. The participation of NGOs and other development-oriented organisations in the governance process is under the control of local politicians. Consequently, it is dangerous for NGOs to go against the wishes of

⁴⁶ Interview with a public health physician in Maguindanao, General Santos City, 24 July 2016.

⁴⁷ Interview with a woman civil society leader and local government officer in Basilan, Davao City, 24 April 2016.

local officials, and in particular to exert pressure on local politicians to provide services to their poor constituents, who are further marginalised by armed conflict. It has been observed that no NGO operating in Mindanao has the capacity or the boldness to criticise local politicians for their ineffectiveness in giving social protection to people, especially during complex crises like war.

The ethical responsibility to criticise and challenge LGUs lies with the Moro NGOs, who are locally based in the Bangsamoro. They are the appropriate groups to demand good governance from their political leaders. These local NGOs are in close proximity to local officials and more aware of the severity of social problems confronting the deprived Moro people, who require immediate government action. The staff of some of the NGOs have a kinship-based relationship with local political leaders of Mindanao.⁴⁸ Hence, trust is no longer an issue among them in discussing sensitive issues pertaining to the urgent needs of their poor and conflict-ridden constituents. Some members of powerful political clans, even the notorious Ampatuan family, are open-minded and very accommodating of insights and collaborative initiatives from the NGOs. The former Mayor of Raja Buayan, Zamzamin Ampatuan, is known for this pro-people leadership style and for his inclination towards partnering with the different social development organisations like the NGOs in his town.⁴⁹ Hence, some NGOs have the ability to find such local champions among the local bosses, who are open-minded and willing to accommodate constructive engagements and partnerships with other organisations.

Focusing on humanitarian assistance rather than promoting good governance

For many reasons, promoting good governance in the conflict-affected areas of Mindanao is not an easy task, especially for NGOs and CSOs. Firstly, it is neither safe nor conducive for NGOs to challenge the regime in the conflict zone, nor to criticise local officials, especially the warlords. The politicians in Mindanao have private armies at their disposal, which they can use to instil threat in their opponents or among those who are detrimental to their interests, including inquisitive NGOs. Secondly, there is a lack of capacity among NGOs to perform their watchdog function, especially in the monitoring and evaluation of development projects of the government. As observed, most NGOs in the southern Philippines are delivering relief and humanitarian operations and do not have the technical capacities to monitor government-funded projects. Thirdly, advocacy for good governance is not a priority of most of the NGOs operating in the conflict areas. They are focused more on humanitarian and relief services, which are vital for the

⁴⁸ Interview with an executive director of a research NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

⁴⁹ Interview with a Muslim civil society leader, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

survival of the poor and war-ravaged population. Fourth, the donor community has no strong motivation to financially support such undertakings of the NGOs. They prefer to fund community development projects and humanitarian assistance to people displaced by war. Perhaps these external donors are likewise avoiding the possibility of antagonising the local politicians, who are important stakeholders in the successful implementation of their aid projects. Lastly, it is very difficult for NGOs and CSOs to build constituencies for good and accountable governance among ordinary members of the community, especially those at the grassroots. Due to extreme poverty and low levels of education, people are more inclined to think of their day-to-day survival. It is a sad reality for most people affected by armed conflict, that concepts related to citizenship, democracy and governance, such as transparency, accountability, and rule of law have a very low priority, at best.⁵⁰

Engaging with the belligerents

Even warlords and local government elite do not have exclusive power in the Bangsamoro. The NGOs that are involved in the peace operation in Mindanao are also dealing with informal power structures in belligerent-controlled communities. There are localities in the region that are under the control and leadership of various NSAGs, including the rebel organisations, MNLF and MILF (see Figure 5). In this section, I focus the discussion on the relational dynamics between the NGOs and the MILF, which is the most influential insurgency movement with military capability in Mindanao. Nonetheless, this does not mean that NGOs in Mindanao do not have interactions with other armed groups such as the MNLF and the BIFM/BIFF. In fact, there is an overlapping of territory between the MILF and its splinter group, the BIFM/BIFF, in the Province of Maguindanao.

Peace and development NGOs are aware of the existence of the intricate power structure in the conflict zone and have good understanding of such power dynamics. NGOs have gained this knowledge and understanding of power in the conflict zones from their long years of experience in peacebuilding operations and through policy briefs issued by their donors such as the World Bank, ADB and EU. Some big and financially well-equipped NGOs hire local academics and intellectuals as consultants who are well aware of the local context and have strong connections with major power players. For example, they take cognizance of the power arrangement in the Bangsamoro, where the MILF has established parallel government structures in its stronghold

⁵⁰ Interview with a sociology professor in the Mindanao State University-General Santos City and member of the Independent Decommissioning Body, General Santos City, 7 August 2016.

communities. The local commanders run these government structures based on directives from the MILF Central Management Committee in Camp Darapanan in Maguindanao.⁵¹ In these communities, the MILF is the *de facto* government and is more powerful and influential compared to formal power holders, especially the local government officials and politicians. NGOs and other social development organisations that have the intention of entering and operating in MILF-controlled communities have to secure permission from the Central Committee and coordinate with local MILF commanders. This is critically important in order not to put the people working for these organisations into jeopardy and compromise their safety. Without clearance from the MILF, NGO personnel would likely face extortion and harassment. They are likewise vulnerable targets of kidnapping for ransom and even murder. Thus, it is crucial for NGOs not to undermine the presence of informal government structures and the rule of rebel leaders in their operation and peacebuilding initiatives.

Moreover, such kinds of informal power structures can be tapped by NGOs in mobilising support from the members of the community for their development projects. Local commanders of the MILF are among the most influential and respected leaders, who can enjoin community members to participate in different undertakings of the NGOs. Working with the informal power structures in MILF-governed areas could be a sustainability mechanism for NGO projects and peace-related initiatives, as it facilitates the participation and involvement of people from the grassroots. Thus, it fosters a sense of ownership among the local people, as they are involved in the execution and implementation of NGO projects, such as the construction of community-based water systems and school buildings.⁵²

Based on interviews, the following are the key mechanisms employed by NGOs in dealing with the rebels:

Collaborating with donors and rebels in implementing foreign aid-funded projects

The biggest collaboration so far between the MILF, NGOs and the members of the donor community who have ongoing interests in peacebuilding operations in Mindanao is the implementation of socio-economic development projects under the Mindanao Trust Fund for Reconstruction and Development Programme (MTF-RDP).⁵³ The MTF-RDP is a grant facility

⁵¹ Interview with an officer of an international organisation operating in the Bangsamoro, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

⁵² Interview with a public school teacher in Maguindanao, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

⁵³ For more information about the MTF-RDP, visit its website <https://www.mtf.ph>.

established by the World Bank in 2005, which consolidates international development assistance for different foreign donor agencies. This grant facility is designed to support socio-economic recovery of conflict-ridden communities in Mindanao, particularly the vulnerable groups in the Bangsamoro. In terms of governance structure, the MILF is the chair of the board through the BDA,⁵⁴ while the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process (OPAPP) of the Government of the Philippines and the World Bank Philippines are co-chairs of the Steering Committee. The members of the Steering Committee include the Mindanao Development Authority, the European Delegation to the Philippines and the Governments of Sweden, Australia, Canada, United States and New Zealand. The United Nations and the Japan International Cooperation Agency are the international observers that oversee the implementation of the MTF-RDP. As far as the MTF-RDP is concerned, the MILF may be considered as a formal actor that takes the lead in transforming its camps into peace and development communities.

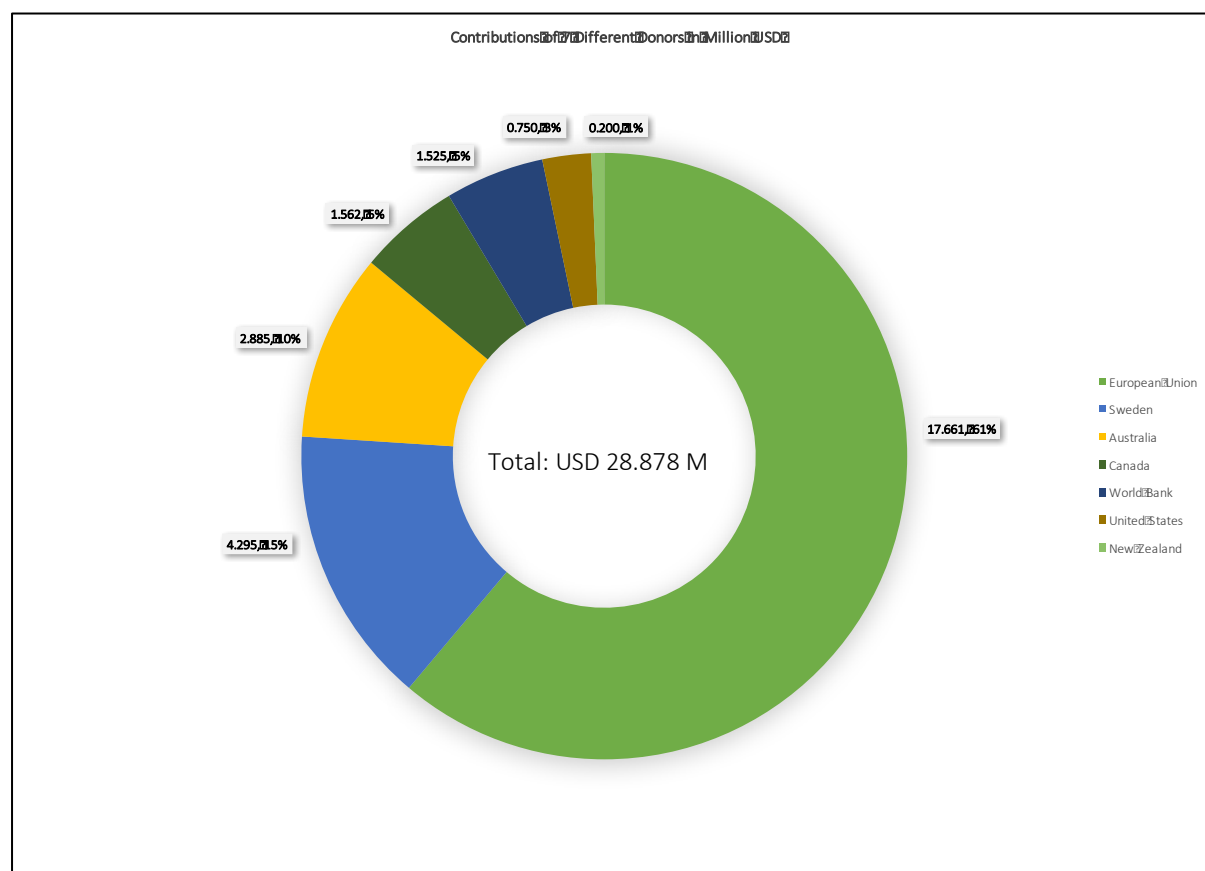
As shown in Figure 10, as of June 2016, the MTF has received a total of USD 28.9 million from seven donor agencies.⁵⁵ The EU is the biggest donor, with a contribution of USD 17.7 million, which accounts for more than 60% of the entire grant. This fund comes from different European states to support the conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding programmes of the EU, as a supranational organisation. According to the financial data provided by the European Commission, the EU has committed EUR 43 million, or approximately USD 50.1 million for the MTF-RDP from December 2009 to June 2017.⁵⁶ Interestingly, Sweden, which is an EU member country, is the second biggest donor to the MTF. Sweden is followed by other donors such as Australia, Canada and the World Bank with a substantial amount of contributions. The United States and New Zealand have the lowest aggregate contributions of less than USD 1 million. Spain is the latest contributor to the MTF, with funding support of EUR 1 million (World Bank 2018). These figures show that Mindanao receives a large amount of foreign aid from various countries and international organisations. Moreover, this also suggests that the members of the donor community have demonstrated an ongoing interest in providing financial support towards peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao (see also Adriano and Parks 2013), even if it means cooperating with insurgents.

⁵⁴ For more information about BDA, visit its website <http://bangsamorodevelopment.org/history/>

⁵⁵ Based on data from the World Bank, that is publicly available in its website <https://www.mtf.ph/finance>.

⁵⁶ This aid figure is from the European Commission, which is publicly available on its website https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/mindanao-trust-fund-reconstruction-development-programme_en.

Figure 10. MTF contributions of seven donors (as of June 2016)



Source: The World Bank (2016)

The implementation of multi-million-dollar projects under the MTF-RDP has been made possible through the major participation of two NGOs. These are the Community and Family Services International (CFSI) and the Mindanao Land Acquisition, Housing and Development Foundation (MinLand). The World Bank appointed these NGOs as recipients of the trust fund due to legal prohibitions which prevented the BDA of the MILF from receiving money directly from the funding agencies. These two NGOs were chosen by the World Bank owing to their reliable financial management systems and sound credentials in peace work in Mindanao.⁵⁷ BDA is the development arm of the MILF that was created as a result of the 2001 Tripoli Agreement on Peace between the Philippine government and the MILF, signed in Libya. Its mandate is to “lead, manage and determine relief and rehabilitation in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao” (Bangsamoro

⁵⁷ Interviews with BDA officers, General Santos City, 27 July 2016.

Development Authority 2018). However, the BDA has no legal status to receive funds, especially from foreign donors, because it is not registered with the SEC. It is likewise an agency that is directly supervised by the MILF Central Management Committee, which is a rebel organisation that has the military power to challenge the sovereignty of the Philippine state. Moreover, the MILF refused to seek SEC registration of the BDA, as the former is an agency of the Philippine government. Therefore, for the MILF, it is inappropriate for the BDA to be bound by the regulatory powers of the SEC.⁵⁸ The existence of the BDA as the development arm of the insurgent organisation does not afford the MILF status as a formal actor. It remains a revolutionary organisation that is negotiating a peace settlement with the Philippine government.

The BDA runs community-driven development projects in different parts of Mindanao in partnership with CFSI and MinLand. Social development projects are given to the localities where the six major and twenty-five satellite camps of the MILF are situated. The objective of the trust fund is to transform MILF camps into peace and development communities through the use of international development assistance. With this kind of organisational arrangement, these two NGOs can engage in peace and development work in different MILF communities without facing much danger compared to other NGOs in Mindanao. At the time of writing, CFSI and MinLand are given full authority from the Steering Committee of the MTF to implement social development projects in the six major MILF camps, without the need of collaboration with the BDA.⁵⁹ This arrangement is necessary to hasten the process of transforming key MILF camps into peaceful and productive communities, which is part of the commitment of the Philippine government to the MILF as provided in the FAB's Annex on Normalisation.

Development workers of these two NGOs have a safe conduct pass to enter and to implement projects in localities in Mindanao, which are known territories of the MILF. However, for their protection and safety, it is important for them to coordinate their travels to BDA, whenever they enter MILF communities. These NGOs jointly run projects in MILF-controlled communities with the staff of BDA, particularly in localities where the twenty-five satellite camps are located.⁶⁰ Moreover, CFSI and MinLand gain financial benefits and monetary incentives as trust fund

⁵⁸ Interview with a senior professor and anthropologist in the Mindanao State University, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

⁵⁹ Confidential interview with an officer of the BDA, General Santos City, 19 August 2016.

⁶⁰ Interview with BDA officers, General Santos City, 27 July 2016.

recipients. Both NGOs can retain a certain percentage of the total amount from the World Bank as management costs for administering the funds.⁶¹

Using kinship ties in dealing with the rebels

In dealing with the rebels, not all NGOs involved in peace operations in Mindanao get the same privileges as those accorded to CFSI and MinLand. Others have learned ways to engage and deal with MILF rebels in communities where they are implementing projects. Some of the established NGOs present in Mindanao, especially the INGOs, such as TAF and the HD Centre have strong connections with top leaders of the MILF, as well as leaders at the grassroots level. There are people working in local NGOs who have access to the ground commanders and MILF combatants, who are their relatives. In this case, using kin-based networks has become an effective mechanism for NGOs to gain access to dangerous communities occupied by the rebels. One noteworthy example of using kinship ties in dealing with the MILF is when the chairman of the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, Mr. Guiamel Alim, negotiated with the at-large top-ranking leaders of the MILF after the siege in the *Buliok* Complex, so that they would go back to the peace table with the Government of the Philippines. Because of family affiliation with these high-ranking rebel commanders, NGO leaders can engage them in dialogues and negotiations, as trust is not a major concern.⁶²

It is clear that some NGOs gain advantage over others by using their available social capital. They have personal access to rebel leaders and other hostile and coercive actors in the conflict zone. Some NGOs hire local consultants who are relatives of the commanders, or someone whose social network includes the top leaders of insurgent organisations. The use of kinship networks is a comparative advantage of affluent and well-connected NGOs. They normally develop linkages with local NGOs in implementing projects that have the capacity to communicate with different power players on the ground. Local NGOs that are led by influential Moro leaders are likely to take advantage of kinship ties in their peacebuilding operations. However, not all NGOs in Mindanao are in a position to employ kinship ties, which limits their capacity to deliver services for poor people in rebel-controlled communities, due to a lack of connection with the local commanders.⁶³

⁶¹ Interview with an executive director of a research NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

⁶² Interview with a Muslim civil society leader, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

⁶³ Interview with an executive director of a research NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

Working with grassroots leaders to access insurgent communities

The most effective way for NGOs to penetrate MILF territories is to find champions who are influential individuals in the community. These people could be the customary and traditional chiefs, *ulama* or religious leaders, or government workers who have networks with the MILF. Soliciting the support of traditional and religious leaders of a particular community ensures the safety of NGO workers and is necessary to encourage community members to take part in the execution of NGO projects.⁶⁴ These leaders are well respected by the local people, including the ground commanders of the MILF. In some places, particularly in Maguindanao, MILF commanders are religious and traditional leaders too. In some cases, these commanders manage and run their own NGOs as executive directors. Moreover, some have learned to utilise their linkages with government workers, especially school teachers and public health workers, to gain access to MILF communities.⁶⁵ These public-school teachers and health workers are family members, in some cases wives or daughters of MILF commanders and combatants, who can grant permission to NGOs to enter the community. Therefore, the use of social networks has proven effective for NGOs to work in MILF communities. This research also found that the social network is useful for NGOs in delivering services to other marginalised communities in Maguindanao that are controlled by the BIFF and in places where the Philippine government has no peace agreement.⁶⁶

Even today, the southern part of Mindanao contains the remnants of ancient forms of government. The culture of *datuism* still exists in most areas in the Bangsamoro, where the people show courtesy and obedience to their traditional leaders. Traditional rulers have high reputations in the local community and are therefore very influential in helping NGOs that are operating in their areas.⁶⁷

Another group of people tapped by NGOs whenever they have projects in local communities are the *imams*, or religious leaders, and the *ustadz*, or *madrasah* teachers. These individuals are part of the social networks of most members of the community. They can provide assistance to NGOs

⁶⁴ Interview with a public health physician in Maguindanao, General Santos City, 24 July 2016.

⁶⁵ Interview with a public health physician in Maguindanao, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

⁶⁶ Interview with a public school teacher in Maguindanao, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

⁶⁷ Confidential interview with an anonymous academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

in all phases of project development, from social preparation to implementation. The wide social influence of these charismatic actors enables NGOs to earn the trust of community members, where some have an aversion to dealing with foreigners or with anyone who is an outsider. The *imams* and *ustadz* are also the best people to disseminate information about NGO projects and advocacies throughout the community. For instance, these *imams* and *ustadz* have been valuable partners of the UNICEF and the NGO Plan International in their “children not soldiers” campaign in various localities in Mindanao.⁶⁸ This is an advocacy campaign to stop armed groups from recruiting children to become combatants. These religious leaders and teachers can convince the members of the community, especially the parents, not to allow their children to undergo military training, carry firearms, or fight in battles for the MILF or other armed groups.

Engaging with other groups

In the conflict-affected communities, there are various other groups, although they are less influential, who are critical partners of NGOs in the course of social service delivery. Part of the security sector reform is to improve the quality of the relationship of the military with the members of the community. Some NGOs collaborate with the AFP in the implementation of community development projects. In Mindanao, it is no longer surprising to see government soldiers helping in the construction of school buildings and other learning facilities, as well as in repairing public infrastructure such as bridges and water systems. However, NGOs are aware of when and where to have joint undertakings with the military. In Maguindanao, NGO-military projects are permitted in some areas. Nonetheless, there are communities where the presence of the military would only mean harm to people working with NGOs. These are communities that are under the control of MILF and BIFF commanders, who have a strong aversion to the presence of government soldiers in their territories.⁶⁹ The high level of animosity of Moro people towards the members of the armed forces has a deep historical underpinning. For example, the infamous Jabidah and Malisbong Massacres were allegedly perpetrated by the military (see Cagoco-Guam 2004; Salic-Macasalong 2014).

⁶⁸ Interview with a woman Moro leader and consultant of an international NGO in the Bangsamoro, General Santos City, 30 July 2016.

⁶⁹ Interview with a public health physician in Maguindanao, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

4.4 | Perils in the conflict zone and their implications on NGO peace operations

The volatile security situation in Mindanao poses a major challenge in the peacebuilding operations of development NGOs. It is imperative for them to take into consideration the multiple of factors and circumstances that may affect their operations and presence in the conflict zone. Being caught in the crossfire between the AFP and the different guerrilla groups, which would certainly compromise the safety of their personnel, is not the only possibility that development NGOs have to take into consideration. Some of them, especially those with long years of experience in dealing with the conflict and emergency situations in Mindanao, have learned the skills of avoiding combat among warring groups. They know where and when a possible skirmish might happen.

Aside from information coming from the military, some NGOs have direct and indirect access to the rebel commanders on the ground and to community leaders, who feed them information about the potential outbreak of atrocities. In some instances, connections with rebel commanders are established through people working in the government, especially teachers and health workers who are relatives of the commanders. For example, a midwife in one town whose husband is a commander of the MILF usually gives information about the security situation of the area to the Municipal Health Office, as well as to their partner NGOs.⁷⁰ In addition, public school teachers, particularly in the Province of Maguindanao, are reliable sources of information about the security status of the community. They are usually informed by their students of any possible outbreak of hostilities in their communities. Students who are sons and daughters of commanders and rebels, are aware whenever there is mobilisation on the part of the guerrilla forces.⁷¹ In this way, NGOs can determine the most appropriate time to enter communities that are at risk of armed encounters.

The persistent security threat faced by NGO development workers is detrimental to communities that rely on their services. This is particularly true in the Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) in the Bangsamoro, which are hubs of poverty and have minimal access to government services. Development organisations, especially international organisations and NGOs, routinely suspend their operations in GIDA when the safety of their personnel is not

⁷⁰ Interview of with two anonymous public health physicians in Maguindanao, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

⁷¹ Interviews with two anonymous public school teachers in Maguindanao, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

guaranteed.⁷² This security protocol of NGOs is vital for the protection of their personnel. Nevertheless, the suspension of NGO projects and relief initiatives is harmful to the people in GIDA. The delay in the delivery of alternative services to isolated and impoverished communities aggravates the existing state of marginalisation. Hence, security is a crucial prerequisite for peace actors, including NGOs, in order to fully operate and execute their peace and development functions, particularly in the GIDA. Being unable to ensure continuous operation also affects the nature of the programmes that can be implemented by NGOs. In fact, there are some instances where NGOs are forced to abandon their operations or implementation of new projects due to the sudden outbreak of war in the Bangsamoro. Therefore, the complex regime in Mindanao, which is characterised by the existence of multiple power brokers who have the agency to wage violence constitutes a precarious environment for NGOs and donors who are involved in the liberal peacebuilding operations.

4.5 | Concluding thoughts

In their peacebuilding operations in the southern Philippines, NGOs have taken into account the existence of complex power dynamics in conflict-affected communities. The coalescing nature of formal-liberal and informal-illiberal powers, and the presence of multiple power nodes and centres is the central feature of the complex political order in the Bangsamoro. This complex political order has a powerful impact on the complexity of the peace operation of NGOs and their donors. The power structure in the war-riddled communities of Mindanao emphasises the preponderance of the authoritarian power of warlord clans, whose power and influence emanate from political, military, traditional and even illegal sources. Even so, although there is an obvious concentration of power in the hands of warlord politicians, it is worth noting that the Philippine government still remains the most powerful institution in Mindanao. It can use the might of its military and police forces to neutralise and incarcerate erring warlords, like the Ampatuans, who perpetuated the Maguindanao massacre. This research supports the claim of Lara (2014) and Abinales (2009b, 13 December) that the resilience of the political authority of warlord politicians is primarily due to the protection afforded by political elite in the central government. The loyalty and allegiance of Mindanao's warlords is strategically important for the national level politicians to get block votes during elections. In some localities, leaders of belligerent organisations act as *de facto* rulers of their loyal sympathisers and supporters. Moreover, the asymmetries of power in the Bangsamoro highlights the existence of a zone of marginalisation and the exclusion from political participation

⁷² Interview with a public health physician in Maguindanao, General Santos City, 24 July 2016.

of powerless groups comprising the IDPs and indigenous people, as well as women and their children.

Dealing with the warlord politicians and rebel commanders on the ground has become a non-negotiable mechanism for NGOs to operate safely in the conflict zone. This type of relationship with the strongmen or bosses in the conflict communities entails a number of detrimental consequences and risks. NGO projects, which are funded by foreign aid, are reported to have been hijacked and captured by powerful individuals in the conflict-ridden communities. Some NGOs have been co-opted by local politicians to serve their interests at the expense of conflict-stricken and powerless groups that are struggling in extreme poverty and marginalisation. To some extent, NGOs have become instrumental in promoting illiberal normative values, particularly patronage and clientelism, in the Bangsamoro. Nonetheless, with substantial understanding of the terrains of power in the Bangsamoro, NGOs have learned various mechanisms, through which they can engage and deal with local political elite, without compromising their safety. NGO participation in local special bodies and development councils, as well as their ability to find political champions among the local strongmen who are willing to support their peace agenda and development interventions, are some notable examples of the aforementioned mechanisms.

A glaring weakness of NGOs in Mindanao is their inability to execute an important civil society function: to challenge the rule of local political leaders and demand responsive, transparent and accountable governance. To compensate for this weakness, NGOs focus rather on their role as alternative channels of social services for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of communities that are devastated by decades of armed conflict. They are agents of socio-economic development, commissioned by the donor agencies to implement aid-funded projects. NGOs tend to concentrate their energies and resources on relief operations, which are immensely important in affording basic social protection to communities in situations of multifaceted emergencies, especially war. They are not immune to flaws and imperfections. Some are criticised for their dubious intentions and corrupt practices. Based on these claims, NGOs cannot make a clear contribution, or they lack the appropriate mechanism to address the appalling issue of the democracy deficit in Mindanao. Nevertheless, the social value of NGOs, as alternative service providers in a context of dysfunctional governance and abject poverty in the conflict zone of Mindanao, is irrefutably high.

Finally, Mindanao's complex regime is characterised by the volatility of the security conditions, which constitutes a stumbling block in the peace operation and brings dangers for NGOs and donors. NGOs and other development organisations cannot engage in peace operations, particularly in remote and isolated areas, when there is an outbreak of hostilities. The continuation of violent armed confrontations between the state security forces and various NSAGs aggravates the state of marginalisation and exclusion of the already disenfranchised groups. NGOs tend to suspend the delivery of social services to marginalised communities when there is armed tension among warring parties. Hence, there is an urgent need for the cessation of hostilities in the Bangsamoro. The combined efforts, through social development interventions, of NGOs, donor agencies, international humanitarian organisations and the government, can be optimised to generate sustainable outcomes for peace only when there is stability and security in the region.

Chapter V

NGOs, Extant Power, Dilemmas and Paradoxes of Liberal Peacebuilding

In the previous chapter, I analysed the complex nature and sources of power of local strongmen and other power brokers in Mindanao. This conflict-ridden community in the southern Philippines is under a complex political order that highlights the power of warlord politicians. The intricacy of the power structure is known to various peace and development organisations, especially NGOs that are participating in multi-track peacebuilding operations. NGOs, commissioned by donors, are the best-suited players to work in Mindanao despite the perilous terrain of conflict. They have the capacity to engage and deal with local political elites, rebel commanders and other power brokers in the region. This agency of NGOs to establish a presence in the conflict zone is of immense importance for them in performing their donor-prescribed liberal peacebuilding functions.

War-ridden Mindanao has become a “theatre of action” (Aron 2003, 54)¹ of different external and local actors who are involved in peace operations and democracy promotion. Among the major participants in the multi-stakeholder peace process are the homegrown and international NGOs. These NGOs are carrying-out a vast array of roles and functions that are aimed at aiding conflict-stricken civilians and bringing about peace and development in the southern Philippines. They are mobilised as strategic service providers of different donor institutions, which are unable to establish a presence directly in the conflict zone owing to security issues. The ongoing flow of foreign aid from various multilateral and bilateral agencies to finance the peace operations makes Mindanao a lucrative playground for different peacebuilding and development NGOs. Many international and local NGOs in the Philippines converge in Mindanao and engage in peacebuilding activities due to the constant interest of the international community to support the peace process financially (see Adriano and Parks 2013).

¹ The phrase “theatre of action” is based on the scholarship of the realist scholar in International Relations, Raymond Aron in his book, *Peace and war: A Theory of International Relations*. His work is not about Mindanao; however, I argue that his theory is aptly suited to describe the lucrative peacebuilding enterprise in the southern Philippines, where NGOs and IOs are major players.

As seen in other localities in different parts of the globe that have experienced intrastate and inter-ethnic conflicts, NGOs and other external actors have the propensity to embark on democracy promotion as their primary modality for peacebuilding (Call 2008). According to Hemmer (2008, 71), “democratisation has become the prescription for peace in conflictual societies.” Peacebuilding through democracy promotion is demonstrated in the peace operations of most IGOs and NGOs in the southern Philippines. These favoured actors are incentivised by different donors to carry out and implement the latter’s liberal-democratic peacebuilding projects (Suleiman 2013) in war-torn communities. They are the strategic peacebuilding players who reinforce the idea that liberalism is intrinsically peace promoting. Their behaviour and actions are shaped by liberal peacebuilding principles, which Mac Ginty labels as the “software that drives the hardware” of different external actors, especially INGOs (2010, 396). Given this context, the case of Mindanao sheds light on the complexities and ambiguities of the role and value of NGOs in facilitating democratic transition and consolidation in post-BOL Mindanao.

Despite its promise of peace and development, the donor-prescribed liberal peacebuilding framework utilised by NGOs is not easily appreciated and accepted in Mindanao. This Western epistemology of peace, although widely popular, faces resistance from various power brokers. The interests of these powerful brokers might be jeopardised because of the democratisation mission of liberal peacebuilding in the autocratic political environment in the southern Philippines. Consequently, the interface of liberal peacebuilding with local forces generates dynamics and tensions in the region. This chapter of the thesis focuses on answering the following primary research questions:

- Why does liberal peacebuilding of donors and NGOs come into conflict with the existing local powers and politics in Mindanao?
- Do NGOs act as a force for good that empowers powerless civilians, or are they destabilising agents that reinforce the prestige and legitimacy of local strongmen and other power brokers in the conflict zone?

This chapter begins with the discussion and analysis of the different tensions that are generated when international liberal peacebuilding interacts with the intricate local power structure in the southern Philippines. Then, it proceeds with the explanation whereby the complex configuration of power and precarious security environment brings about paradoxes or contradictions and ambiguities in the liberal peacebuilding operations of the NGOs. The last section presents an

analysis on how NGOs serve as a force for good and, at the same time, act as a destabilising force that is detrimental to democratic transition in the region.

5.1 | Liberal peacebuilding and Mindanao's local power structure

Liberal peacebuilding is the dominant framework that drives the peace operations of most, if not all, NGOs in the southern Philippines. It is apparent that the institutional framework that guides the behaviour and actions of most peacebuilding NGOs reflects the core values of liberalism. For this reason, the NGOs become strategically important players for various international donors that are promoting a liberal peacebuilding agenda through democratisation in conflict-ridden Mindanao. The protracted and multi-layered armed conflict in the region, which have caused enormous death tolls, internal displacement, and abject poverty, constitute a compelling justification for large-scale humanitarian interventions from the international community. Moreover, for the donor agencies, who are typically tied to their democracy promotion projects, NGOs are seen as the most viable actors to deliver relief and development assistance to conflict-affected communities.

The case of Mindanao offers empirical evidence of liberalism-inspired mechanisms and approaches for peacebuilding, as employed by various development NGOs. Scholars like Doyle (2005), Newman, Paris and Richmond (2009) and Mac Ginty (2010), ascertain that there is no definitive and concrete description of liberal peacebuilding. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify the referents or indicators of liberal values that are regularly embedded in the peace interventions of NGOs in the southern Philippines. These activities of peacebuilding NGOs are arguably the empirical features of the domestic variant of the liberal peace theory, which is traditionally applied in peace studies to analyse the dynamics of interstate conflicts.

Liberal peacebuilding is claimed to have “universal relevance” (Curtis 2012, 10). It has become a standard model used by NGOs in peace operations in insecure political environments that are marred with intrastate conflict. This model of peacebuilding is prescribed by influential and resource-rich IGOs, particularly those from the UN (Philpott 2012; Newman 2011; Richmond and Franks 2009) and the European Union (Richmond, Björkdahl and Kappler 2011; Lidén, Mikhelidze, Stavrevska and Vogel 2016). Newman, Paris and Richmond (2009, 23) criticise the international community of peacebuilders for their assumption that war-prone societies are “uniform virgin territories onto which liberal ideas can be promoted (or even imposed), despite local differences.” The promotion and imposition of liberal peacebuilding generates tensions when

it interacts with various extant social forces at the ground level. Some of these tensions are obviously manifested, while others are considerably covert or hidden.

In this research, I argue that the liberal peacebuilding activities of NGOs have come up against the current power configuration in Mindanao. Different forms of tensions are generated because liberal peacebuilding has the tendency to reshape power structures in this war-torn region of the Philippines. It aims to open up democratic spaces and build platforms for participation in the conflict zone, which has been under different pockets of local authoritarianism for decades. Local power brokers have the ability to pose resistance, especially to components of liberal peacebuilding that have detrimental impacts on their interests and diminishing effects on their prestige and power. The complex configuration of power and the precarious security conditions in war-torn Mindanao have caused various dilemmas and ambiguities for liberal peacebuilding. The following are the most apparent dilemmas and ambiguities confronting liberal peacebuilding operations in the southern Philippines. The themes set out in the discussion of these different dilemmas and ambiguities are based on interviews.

Liberal peacebuilding is a threat to warlords' power

The liberal peacebuilding paradigm that guides the actions of donors and NGOs goes against the current configuration of power in Mindanao. This peacebuilding model is perceived as a major threat to the power of warlord politicians who are the dominant strongmen and local bosses in their respective bailiwicks. They possess a huge amount of political and economic power. As discussed in Chapter four, warlordism in Mindanao is characterised by the existence of local strongmen who have multi-factoral powers. Warlords are not mere owners of private militias. In most cases, they are also officially elected as local politicians of different towns and provinces in the Bangsamoro. Some are even associated with major armed groups as leaders of the MILF and MNLF.² Moreover, they have multiple sources of powers from both legal and illegal sources (see Lara and Schoofs 2013; Lara 2014). In societies with “hybrid political order,” security is best maintained through fusion of traditional and modern political systems (Boege et al. 2009, 13). According to Logan (2013), traditional leaders who have acquired leadership in politics are resilient because ordinary civilians confer legitimacy on them as they represent extant cultural and traditional institutions on the ground, particularly religious institutions. In Mindanao, the greatest amount of political power is in the hands of local strongmen due to the legitimating support of

² Confidential interview with an anonymous academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

local populations in the conflict zone and the inability of the central government to consistently impose the rule of law.

Democratisation is a key component of liberal peacebuilding. It seeks to open up spaces (Shlash and Tom 2011) for political participation of people affected by armed conflict. It also seeks to facilitate democratic inclusion of previously marginalised and subordinated groups in conflictual societies in order to attain legitimacy (Young 2000). Opening up political spaces in war-torn Mindanao constitutes a major threat to the power of local strongmen, who have been in control of local politics for decades. Different groups seeking power are likely to emerge due to the creation of political spaces, particularly in post-war environments (Boege et al. 2009). They may engage in political contests against powerful local strongmen during elections. The rise in the number of electoral participants is an affirmative step towards democratisation (Shlash and Tom 2011). Nonetheless, most powerful local strongmen do not have the inclination to engage in competitive and fair elections. For them, the rise of political challengers in the electoral arena is a huge insult to their status. One warlord in Maguindanao is notorious for publicly issuing a grave warning against potential political rivals, including his own relatives. According to a respondent and Moro scholar, this warlord once told one of his nephews who wished to run for a mayoralty post in Maguindanao,

*Abpon saguna gey, suke kadan sa putaw a banggala.*³

(From this day on, you should wear clothes made of iron)

That word from the warlord is maybe anecdotal concerning his aversion to welcoming opponents in an open and free election. However, telling his opponent to protect himself with a bulletproof vest is an outright expression of a warlord's deterrent power because he owns a private army. They often see their political opponents as their personal enemies who must be eliminated using violence. The rise of potential contenders in an electoral exercise threatens the power of local strongmen. The gruesome 2014 massacre perpetrated by the powerful Ampatuan clan against their rival, the Mangudadatu family in Maguindanao Province (see Santos 2014), demonstrates the aversion of a warlord clan to sharing power and their capacity to employ violence in eliminating political opponents.

³ Confidential interview, General Santos City, 26 August 2016.

Another source of threat to the power of local strongmen brought about by liberal peacebuilding is the enforcement of transitional justice processes and mechanisms in the Bangsamoro. Transitional justice has become central to present-day peacebuilding operations in conflictual societies. It is often equated with the notions of democracy, justice and peace, which are deeply ingrained in the liberal peacebuilding paradigm (Sriram 2007). Andrieu (2010, 537) claims that transitional justice is the latest inclusion to the “liberal peacebuilding package” due to its civilising effects on contemporary peacebuilding efforts. It is designed to deal with crimes and human rights abuses committed in the past with impunity, especially during the height of conflicts. In post-BOL Mindanao, some NGOs have recently engaged in enacting transitional justice programmes to help in facilitating democratic transition. The Annex on Normalisation to the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) provides for the creation of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) to “address the legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoro people, correct historical injustices, and address human rights violations” (FAB-Annex on Normalisation 2012, 8). Moreover, the said document also calls for the disbandment of private armies in different parts of Mindanao. This shows that the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms in the region is obviously detrimental to the interests and power of local strongmen.

Disbanding the private militias of the strongmen would certainly diminish their capacity to preserve their political and economic powers, particularly their control over the lucrative shadow economy in Mindanao (see Lara and Schoofs 2013; Mercado 2010). Without their private armies, they would be powerless to counter security threats from terrorist and lawless groups, such as the BIFF and Abu Sayyaf. They would be unable to employ threat, which is an effective tool to coerce civilians to vote for them in an election. Moreover, local strongmen fear prosecution and eventual incarceration. Most of the human rights violations committed against powerless groups, especially destitute civilians and indigenous peoples, are allegedly sanctioned and authorised by these local strongmen and carried out by their private armies.⁴ The resistance from local strongmen towards liberal peacebuilding efforts, especially that of NGOs, has been expected and fairly normal. NGO success in implementing transitional justice strategies would probably cause a significant reduction in the amount of power of Mindanao’s strongmen. The defiant attitude of local strongmen towards threatening components of liberal peacebuilding, like transitional justice is not surprising as they also endeavour to preserve their power and interests in the southern Philippines.⁵ Therefore, scholars like Fischer (2011) and Sooka (2006) who have an interest in transitional justice, stress the

⁴ Confidential interview with an anonymous human rights investigator, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

⁵ Confidential interview with an anonymous academic, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

need for peacebuilding actors, especially NGOs, to take into careful consideration the powers and networks of warlords in designing transitional justice programmes in communities marred by violent conflict.

Liberal peacebuilding is seen as rewarding insurgent groups

The design of liberal peacebuilding strategies in Mindanao is facing criticism that it largely favours the interest of the armed groups. When the MNLF entered into peace negotiations with the Philippine government in a previous year, they accumulated a substantial quantity of material rewards and political favours. Key leaders, like Nur Misuari, Parouk Hussin and Muslimin Sema succeeded in getting elected into political office in the Bangsamoro. They also received generous grants from various donor agencies and NGOs that committed financial support to the Special Zone of Peace and Development in war-torn Mindanao (CISAC, 2018).

Regarding the current peace process, the centre of attention for most local and international peacebuilding players is the MILF. This armed group appears to be the favoured child of the foreign donor community due to its inclination to sign two peace agreements with the Philippine government in 2012 and 2014 respectively. Most NGOs have been observed to rally behind and support the cause and agenda of the MILF.⁶ Supporting the MILF is a practical move for NGOs to access more money from donor agencies, particularly the World Bank and EU, who have ongoing interests in facilitating the transformation of the MILF from a revolutionary movement to a political organisation.⁷ The multi-million dollar Mindanao Trust Fund given to the BDA of the MILF is a clear indication of the donors' preference to finance development projects in MILF-controlled communities in the southern Philippines (World Bank 2016).

Liberal peacebuilding players, particularly NGOs and their donors, see the need to assist the MILF in its efforts to abandon its separatist claim and reinvent itself as a democratic institution that is willing to vie for political power in an open and free election. The preferential treatment given by donors to armed groups is a commonly observed phenomenon in many war-prone societies, like Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see Le Billion 2008). Foreign donors often view armed groups as the most influential associations, comprising of powerful individuals, in conflictual societies. It has become an imperative for donors to grant foreign aid and other

⁶ Confidential interview with an anonymous academic, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

⁷ Confidential interview with an anonymous member of the EU Philippine Delegation, Makati City, 12 August 2016.

incentives so that the armed groups will have increased motivation to negotiate and sign a peace accord with the government. Aid also serves as a peace dividend that builds the confidence among the followers and supporters of the armed groups in the peace process (Rubin 2013).

In Mindanao, NGOs are the primary liberal peace agents who are mobilised by donors in transforming the MILF from a war machine to a political apparatus. Rebel leaders and commanders are the most powerful people and act as *de facto* political rulers in their respective territories.⁸ Hence, NGO initiatives to build the capacity of the MILF leaders for political leadership, governance and public affairs management are reinforcing and legitimising the power of rebel leaders. They are also likely to lay the foundation for the rise of a new circle of political elites in the Bangsamoro that is made up of former rebel commanders.

The number of favours given to the MILF invites criticism against liberal peacebuilding efforts in the southern Philippines. Influential local politicians who are the real power brokers and gatekeepers in Mindanao express vehement objections to the existing design of liberal peacebuilding operations in Mindanao. For them, the current efforts of NGOs, donors and the Philippine government to build peace in Mindanao are all serving the agenda and interests of the MILF. This favoured status of the MILF in the current peace process constitutes a major threat to the power of local Muslim politicians. For this reason, these local strongmen are resisting the current mode of liberal peacebuilding operations in Mindanao. They have also voiced a threat to use their military infrastructure against the MILF when their powers are undermined and their interests are side-lined.⁹ This sort of dilemma of liberal peacebuilding is not exclusive to the resistance expressed by powerful local strongmen. Relatively powerless groups, especially indigenous peoples, are also criticising the peace operations in Mindanao, which heavily favour the Moro people, particularly those with a capacity to instigate rebellion against the state, like the MILF and MNLF. The voice of indigenous peoples who are among the most vulnerable groups in these violent conflicts has been largely ignored in previous and present peace agreements.¹⁰

The tendency of liberal peace agents to boost the power of armed groups in the hope of transforming them into democratic institutions makes liberal peacebuilding problematic. Social

⁸ Confidential interview with an anonymous International NGO official, Makati City, 11 August 2016.

⁹ Confidential interview with an anonymous political anthropologist and NGO official, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

¹⁰ Confidential interview with a tribal chieftain of the Arumanen-Manobo tribe in North Cotabato, Davao City, 23 April 2016.

justice is at the core of the liberal peace theory (Curtis 2012). It emphasises tolerance, diversity, equal opportunity and protection of individual property (Ozerdem and Lee 2016). It also stresses a “fair distribution of power and material resources” (Chetail and Jütersonke 2014, 1). In reality, these normative values that are supposed to guide liberal peacebuilding operations on the ground are not manifested in the actual activities of liberal peace agents, especially NGOs. Therefore, the apparent favoritism shown by most NGOs and donors to the MILF constructs a hypocritical image of liberal peacebuilding in Mindanao.

Local power influences liberal peacebuilding to be selective

The intricate power structure and perilous terrain of conflict limits the capacity of NGOs to carry out a comprehensive liberal peacebuilding operation in Mindanao. Although hundreds of international and local NGOs have converged in the Bangsamoro to participate in a multi-track peacebuilding effort, they have made minimal impacts on democratisation.¹¹ In Mindanao, most NGOs tend to focus on performing the less complicated and non-threatening functions of liberal peacebuilding, particularly emergency and relief operations, poverty alleviation and non-formal and community-based education. These types of services are always welcome in conflict-prone communities due to the dire socio-economic conditions of poor people in the Bangsamoro. These services are used by NGOs as leverage with local strongmen and rebel commanders so that they can enter and work in conflict-affected communities. The consent of these local power brokers and gatekeepers granted to NGOs is crucial for them to operate safely in the perilous environment of the region.

It is inevitable for NGOs to engage with and respect the existing illiberal power structures in different parts of Mindanao. Dealing with informal and illiberal actors is an imperative for peacebuilding NGOs to deliver their services to the poverty-stricken and conflict-riven population in the Bangsamoro. Nonetheless, this kind of interaction between liberal NGOs and illiberal power brokers diminishes the democratic value of the liberal peace. In most instances, liberal NGOs sacrifice their independence and compromise some aspects of their ability to define their priorities and wield influence in the conflict zone. Local strongmen have the power to dictate to NGOs where they can operate and who should be recipients of their projects. Aid-funded services from NGOs for poor people in the conflict zone, in some cases, are beneficial to reinforce the power of local politicians. These local rulers typically choose their political supporters and relatives as

¹¹ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

recipients of various services offered by NGOs that are operating in their respective bailiwicks. These rulers are patrons who can exclude and deliberately discriminate between individuals and families who are not their allies and supporters, and prevent them from benefitting from NGO peacebuilding efforts. The exclusionary attitude of local strongmen towards non-supporters is evident in different municipalities in Maguindanao Province. Poor families that are outside the clientelist network of local strongmen are the usually the objects of exclusion and disenfranchisement.¹²

Local strongmen have an aversion to democracy promotion efforts of NGOs that might be harmful to their power and influence in the Bangsamoro. These efforts include governance projects that aim to monitor and curtail graft and corruption, or encourage human rights protection. For this reason, most NGOs focus their efforts on democracy promotion activities that are non-threatening to the interest and political status of warlord politicians. An example of this activity that is not seen as a threat by local strongmen is the conduct of non-formal and community-based education in different localities in Mindanao. Education is a major aspect of liberal peacebuilding that facilitates strong civic engagement of people in war-torn communities (Pemunta and Nkongho 2014).

NGOs in Mindanao are quite successful in conducting their roles in educating the conflict-stricken civilians in Mindanao. With their extensive networks in the conflict zone, they have strongly contributed to raising public awareness about the current peace process between the Philippine government and the MILF. Through a series of public consultations and discussions, Muslim, Christian and *lumad* (indigenous people) communities in the Bangsamoro and other parts of the Philippines have been engaged by NGOs in conversation about the actions of the Philippine government in negotiating a peace deal with the MILF. These public education activities of various NGOs are important for documenting and capturing the variety of sentiments and diverging perspectives of different ethno-linguistic and religious groups about the peace process.¹³ Moreover, to strengthen the liberal norm of civic engagement in Mindanao, NGOs are performing a variety of community-based education activities with the aim of increasing public awareness about transitional justice and reconciliation, human rights,¹⁴ especially minority rights, good

¹² Confidential interview with an ARMM government physician, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

¹³ Confidential interview with a Muslim civil society leader, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

¹⁴ Interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

governance and security sector reforms.¹⁵ The Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS), IAG, HD Centre, and Conciliation Resources are examples of NGOs that are deeply involved in facilitating dialogues and public education on the ground. These NGOs typically invite groups and individuals in civil society, such as religious leaders, university students, local politicians, teachers and university academics, to participate in various forms of public consultation and problem-solving workshops in different parts of the region.¹⁶ This public education initiative of NGOs is part of their distinct secondary role because they do not lead the peace process in Mindanao. However, evidence of NGO contributions to peacebuilding in Mindanao is very clear. According to Dr. Steven Rood, former TAF's Country Director in the Philippines,

For a peace process to be successful, civil society involvement is very helpful. It provides a better channel, not a perfect channel, but a better channel for the sentiments of the average person. No matter what the revolutionary fronts claim about representing the aspiration of the Bangsamoro; by necessity their command and control of their political task force and political organising is a very partial representation of what is going on at the grassroots. Those people who are not part of the movement are not represented.¹⁷

For now, the efforts of NGOs to educate the people in the conflict zone imply no harm to the power and prestige of local strongmen. However, education is potentially disruptive to power. It is a powerful tool to build constituencies among people at the grassroots who are schooled in liberal norms and ideas. It is a major component of liberal peacebuilding that opens democratisation and transforms the behaviour of people on the ground. Public education is a long-term investment of many liberal peace agents to gradually open the consciousness of relatively powerless and politically ignorant civilians towards participatory democracy.¹⁸ It potentially fosters understanding among war-riven civilians of their entitlement to a democratic franchise in political power in a society that is currently monopolised by a few, but very powerful local strongmen. Political education of the people would certainly alter the current configuration of power in the Bangsamoro in the long run. The EU-funded project of IAG and KAS on how to form a political party or a civil society organisation is a good example of the NGOs' political education function

¹⁵ Confidential interview with a political anthropologist and NGO official, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

¹⁶ Confidential interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

¹⁷ Interview, Pasig City, 11 August 2016.

¹⁸ Confidential interview with a sociology professor in the Mindanao State University and member of the Independent Decommissioning Body, General Santos City, 7 August 2016.

that might change the current contestation of power in the Bangsamoro (see Chapter Six for further elaboration).

Local power forces have reductive effects on liberal peacebuilding

The existence of what Kurtenbach (2007, 7) calls a “hybrid regime that uses formal democracy as a façade” and lack of security guarantees in Mindanao generate a major trade-off in the power of democratic peace agents to perform highly sensitive and crucial components of liberal peacebuilding. Peace agents, particularly NGOs, are confronted with a common liberal dilemma in performing dangerous activities that promise transformative outcomes in conflictual societies. NGO liberal peacebuilding activities that are potentially threatening to the powers of local strongmen include local governance reform, human rights protection and election monitoring. The weakness of liberal peace actors to execute interventions in the said areas of liberal peacebuilding aggravate the democracy deficit in Mindanao. There is a widespread consensus among respondents in this study that local politics in the Bangsamoro is characterised by absentee government, electoral fraud, corruption, and human rights violations (see Adriano and Parks 2013; Espesor 2017a; Carter Center 2016).

NGOs in Mindanao have limited capacity in executing their watchdog function to promote good governance and strengthen the practice of transparency and accountability among local leaders. It is also a vital function of NGOs to fight against graft and corrupt practices. The watchdog function of CSOs and NGOs is given emphasis in the academic literature in the scholarship of Paffenholz (2014), Yaziji and Doh (2009), and Nelson (2007). It is also a prescribed function for NGOs by the United Nations in making government institutions accountable, transparent and legitimate (UN ESCAP 2009).

To prevent people in the government bureaucracies from abusing their powers, CSOs and NGOs have to engage with governance, especially in making and carrying out public policies that have a direct bearing on public welfare. They are expected to keep an eye on how transactions are conducted at different levels and instrumentalities of the government and inform the public of any irregularities and anomalies that they might discover. In short, CSOs and NGOs are expected to create platforms to inform the public of any dubious transactions and corrupt practices of people in the public service, especially among politicians and bureaucrats. Moreover, NGOs, like other institutions of democracy, particularly political parties, are expected to channel the demands of the public and social problems to the government for appropriate action (Rajasingham-Senanayake

2009; Clark 1998). Transparency and accountability in the public service is more likely to be achieved when civil society is involved and being vigilant in performing their democracy promotion functions.

The presence of a complex regime that emphasises local authoritarianism in Mindanao constitutes a dangerous political playground for NGOs to perform their watchdog or monitoring function. The political landscape, which is dominated by a few privileged clans and warlords, does not provide a safe and conducive environment for the growth of vigilance and civil society activism. NGOs need to devise *ad hoc* mechanisms whenever they perform their watchdog function. They can only monitor government transactions with utmost anonymity and through discreet enquiries and engagements.¹⁹ At present, some NGOs are mobilised and commissioned as partners of the Philippine government in the implementation and monitoring of different poverty alleviation projects that are funded under the bottoms-up-budgeting (BUB) scheme. Some anomalies in the use of BUB funds in the Bangsamoro were discovered by NGOs and reported to the Philippine National Anti-Poverty Commission.²⁰ Nonetheless, most NGOs operating in Mindanao do not have the capacity to monitor the delivery of public services to the poor or to demand transparency in the use of public funds or file corruption charges against erring government officials.²¹

Mindanao's strongmen have the instruments for coercion to threaten and even eliminate actors, particularly watchdog NGOs that are demanding transparency and accountability. They are notorious for non-implementation of locally funded social development projects and investments, particularly in the areas of health, education and social welfare. It has become an accepted reality in Mindanao that there is no transparency in the utilisation of public funds, especially the use of internal revenue allotment from the national government. An officer in the public service who has collaborative engagements with NGOs in Mindanao said, "You might die first if you are asking the political officials to deliver their funding commitments and how they utilised local funds."²² This government officer describes the politics in the southern Philippines as a family corporation. The mayors, together with other members of the clans, are the controllers of funds and of every aspect of governance in the Bangsamoro.²³ Therefore, in this type of political setting, watchdog organisations, particularly NGOs are not welcome as they may harm the politico-economic

¹⁹ Confidential interview with a Muslim civil society leader, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

²⁰ Confidential interview with an official from the Philippine National Anti-Poverty Commission, Davao City, 24 April 2016.

²¹ Confidential interview with an executive director of a research-based NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

²² Confidential interview with an ARMM government physician, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

²³ Confidential interview with an ARMM government physician, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

interests of local strongmen. Exposing dubious acts of corruption of these local politicians is certainly detrimental to their social prestige and political power. Strongmen are likely to employ violence and coercion to eliminate all forms of threats to their power including the anti-corruption NGOs. According to an anthropology professor and expert on transitional justice,

Most NGOs operating in Mindanao are very careful; they haven't gone through that point of filing graft cases with the Ombudsman that would directly implicate local strongmen for corruption charges. They do not have the capacity for monitoring and evaluation of government-funded projects. NGOs have to prioritise their survival and hence, they are compelled to carry out some sort of self-censorship. They prefer to perform peacebuilding functions that would not incriminate local strongmen. It is imperative for NGOs to make sure that warlords do not suspect them as enemies.²⁴

This academic also added that no NGO in Mindanao has a sincere focus in combating the practice of corruption because of the high security risk. The ARMM Watch, which is an anti-corruption network set up by a coalition of NGOs in the Bangsamoro is deemed moribund because its leaders are co-opted by the government.

Another reductive influence of local strongmen's power on liberal peacebuilding efforts is the limited capacity of NGOs to fight for human rights within the milieu of an active armed conflict. In the southern Philippines, very few NGOs are involved in dealing with human rights issues, which is a key aspect of democratisation according to the liberal peacebuilding framework (Carey 2012). In fact, only one NGO, the Balay Rehabilitation Centre, has an exclusive focus on, and actively campaigns for, the advancement and protection of human rights in Mindanao. Some NGOs are doing human rights advocacy in conjunction with other development and peacebuilding activities. However, in most situations, development NGOs simply refer cases of human rights violations they have documented in the field to the Commission of Human Rights (CHR) and the ARMM Regional Human Rights Commission (ARHC), which are both based in Cotabato City. In general, the role of NGOs is more of communicating violations to the attention of the CHR and ARHC for appropriate action. Identities of NGOs that feed reports to the two human rights commissions are treated with anonymity. Powerful individuals who allegedly

²⁴ Interview, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

perpetrate human rights violations are predisposed to employ the power of violence in exterminating human rights activists.²⁵

NGOs are weak in the area of human rights promotion in conflict-ridden Mindanao. This dilemma confronting liberal peacebuilding is not exclusive to the southern Philippines. Henry Carey argues that “human rights protection is precarious in post-conflict situations” (2012, 87). It is risky to advance respect for human rights and individual freedoms in communities with on-going armed conflict, where the state cannot guarantee the rule of law. The risk confronting NGOs in engaging in human rights monitoring and protection is extremely high. Torture and murders are the most common forms of human rights violations. Often, the agents of the state, specifically government soldiers and policemen, are the perpetrators of human rights abuses. Members of the CAFGU and CVO who are typically enlisted in the private militias of local strongmen are also suspects in human rights violations in the southern Philippines. Human rights groups, including those working for NGOs, are constantly exposed to grave dangers from suspected perpetrators. The suspects are armed personnel who might decide to punish individuals, who are in charge of fact finding and investigations. For example, an investigator of the CHR received threats from a police officer who was under investigation for being a suspected instigator of a crime.²⁶ This incident shows that the lives of human rights activists are always at risk due to partial lawlessness in Mindanao and lack of security protection from the state. Members of the state security forces, accused of human rights abuses, are not the only groups equipped with guns. Personnel of private militias owned by various warlords and members of non-state armed groups have the same capacity to coerce human rights groups, especially rights-based NGOs.

The precarious security condition in the conflict zone is detrimental to the protection of the rights of powerless groups. The IDPs and IPs are prone to suffer human rights abuses in Mindanao.²⁷ Some NGOs devote attention to providing assistance to IDPs and IPs who have been victims of frequent displacement and land dispossession. NGOs like the Non-Violent Peace Force and the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates refer cases to the CHR when local government officials fail to act in helping displaced civilians due to confrontations between the AFP and various armed groups, including the communist New People’s Army (NPA) and the MILF. NGOs usually call the attention of the CHR to issue advisories to mayors or governors who refuse to

²⁵ Confidential interview with a human rights investigator, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

²⁶ Confidential interview with a human rights investigator, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

²⁷ Confidential interview with a tribal chieftain of the Arumanen-Manobo tribe in North Cotabato, Davao City, 23 April 2016.

provide assistance to those who flee to their localities from neighbouring places due to armed clashes. In some cases, the CHR has to exert pressure on local politicians who are not willing to help people displaced by conflict by reminding them of their responsibility to protect these vulnerable groups, especially through the provision of temporary shelter and basic food supplies. Based on the observation of the CHR and its partner NGOs, some mayors and governors are not keen at all to extend help to displaced communities, particularly those groups that do not support them in the election. Hence, the action and willingness of local politicians to help beleaguered communities is highly politicised and largely influenced by patronage politics, and not by legal mandate to protect the rights of displaced communities.²⁸ Consequently, local strongmen often employ their power to deny material favours to people who are not their political supporters.

A critical function of NGOs in democracy promotion is to observe, monitor and assess the conduct of elections in war-prone and post-conflict communities. In the 1980s, NGOs were the pioneers of election monitoring particularly in societies that are transitioning from autocracy to democracy. Through election monitoring, which has become a peacebuilding strategy, they reinforce the legitimacy and credibility of free and fair elections in conflictual societies (Chand 1997). In Mindanao, NGOs have limited roles in the monitoring of elections due to security issues and geographic isolation of some communities. The Carter Center (2016), a US-based human rights NGO, reported that the ARMM and its neighbouring areas suffered from a high-level of violence on election day. Indications of electoral fraud and anomalies were also noticed. It is difficult and dangerous for election monitors, including NGOs, to observe the conduct of elections in conflict affected areas due to imminent threats from different local strongmen who are vying for key positions in local politics. It is a reality in Mindanao that warlords are using their private armies to force ordinary civilians to vote for them in elections. Members of the private militias are also deployed to coerce and even kill political opponents.²⁹

Despite the danger of monitoring elections in the southern Philippines, NGOs together with other international observers are encouraged to conduct election observations and assessments. According to the United Nations (2005), democratic elections are a key element in peacebuilding and election observation is important in the promotion and protection of civil and political rights of people who are participating in a democratic exercise, particularly in a post-conflict setting. It is also necessary to deter electoral fraud, to increase the legitimacy of the government, and to

²⁸ Confidential interview with a human rights investigator, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

²⁹ Confidential interview with a Philippine Navy officer, General Santos City, 2 July 2016.

motivate citizens to trust the democratic process. Moreover, election observation is crucially important to help consolidate democracy in post-conflict societies. As in the areas of human rights and combatting corruption in government, NGOs have had limited capacity in monitoring the elections in the Philippines. Only a few NGOs like the National Citizen's Movement for Free Election in the Philippines and the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting have the capacity to serve as election watchdogs in the Philippines. Both these NGOs are observers in the electoral process throughout the country, including the conflict-prone areas of Mindanao. Human rights NGOs, like the Legal Network for Truthful Elections and the Alliance of Human Rights Advocates are collaborating with the CHR to document electoral malfeasance and human rights violations. Moreover, these NGOs are also conducting voter education among ordinary civilians in the conflict zones to increase peoples' awareness of their electoral rights (Carter Center 2016).

In summary, combating corruption through governance reforms, fighting human rights abuses, and monitoring the conduct of elections are among the critical functions of NGOs involved in the liberal peacebuilding operations. The case of Mindanao offers the insight that NGOs are generally weak due to their limited capacity to perform those critical and sensitive liberal peacebuilding functions. The current system in the southern Philippines that is based on the dominance of local strongmen is not favourable to the existence and emergence of rights-based NGOs. This type of NGO is perceived as a grave threat to the political status and powers of Mindanao's strongmen.³⁰ Owing to the absence of a security guarantee and a hostile stance of local strongmen towards opposition, rights-based NGOs in Mindanao are unable to employ their methodological strength of naming and shaming erring government officials and human rights violators (see Franklin 2015; Meernik, Aloisi, Sowell and Nichols 2012). According to Kenneth Roth, the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, the principal power of rights-based NGOs lies in their ability to scrutinise powerful people in the government who are allegedly committing human rights violations to stir up anger among people. He adds that the tenacity of human rights NGOs does not lie in "their rhetorical voice but their shaming methodology- their ability to investigate misconduct and expose it to public opprobrium" (Roth 2004, 63). NGOs need to possess courage and agency not only to criticise politicians and other powerful individuals, but also to demonise them if necessary, to generate public outrage. Nonetheless, this name and shame methodology prescribed for NGOs is too dangerous for those operating in communities where there is no guarantee of security. Local strongmen are likely to harness their coercive powers to

³⁰ Confidential interview with an executive director of a research-based NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

intimidate rights-based NGOs and to stop them from performing their critical liberal peacebuilding functions as evidenced by a dearth of NGOs working on human rights in Mindanao.

It is clear that the complex power structure and precarious political environment in Mindanao obstructs the potentials of peacebuilding NGOs to execute their watchdog, human rights protection and election monitoring functions. These sensitive and critical functions are vital in democratising war-prone societies and also in facilitating the opening up of democratic spaces that threaten the existing regimes in the southern Philippines. Democratisation is likely to invite and motivate other groups that might vie for political power against traditional political rulers. Opening up political spaces generates “systemic incoherence” due to the existence of opposing forces “when elements of democracy and autocracy are combined” (Davenport and Armstrong 2004, 541). NGO liberal-democratic activities breed insecurity on the part of local strongmen whose power and interest might dwindle when previously subordinated groups gain some degree of power due to the emergence of new political spaces in the conflict zone of Mindanao.

Earning the antagonism of Mindanao’s strongmen is not favourable to the interest and continued existence of NGOs that are participating in lucrative peacebuilding operations. Access to conflict-affected communities of Mindanao is a source of strength for NGOs as major peacebuilding players. Their presence and network on the ground make them appealing to donors.³¹ The power of NGOs to provide emergency aid to war ravaged civilians is typically framed under human rights rhetoric. They claim that they are promoting the economic, social and cultural rights of powerless groups to reinforce their credibility (Roth 2004) and legitimacy in conflictual societies. Nonetheless, naming and shaming the powerful local strongmen in Mindanao to advance the state of democracy in the conflict zone is not tactically feasible. These powerful rulers have the power to make the politico-security environment in their respective domains very dangerous and unpleasant for NGOs. They can bar NGOs from entering their communities if they intend harm to their power and status as political rulers. Although NGOs are legally allowed to enter any community in the Philippines, informal institutions under the control of local strongmen in the conflict zone are powerful enough to block and prohibit the entrance of NGOs that may be harmful to extant forces and local beliefs. Hence, it is practical for most NGOs not to embark on critical and highly sensitive civil society functions like combating corruption in government or protecting human rights. It is an imperative for domestic and international NGOs to preserve their

³¹ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

access to conflict-torn communities in the southern Philippines. Otherwise, it would be hard for them to convince different donor agencies to give them peacebuilding aid, which is vital for their survival.³²

Additional factors that reinforce the apparent weakness of NGOs in performing their sensitive democracy-promotion functions are the lack of expertise and feeble democratic constituency on the ground. In Mindanao, very few NGOs have the expertise for good governance, human rights promotion and protection and monitoring of the elections. Instead, most of them have focused on providing relief and emergency aid to conflict-affected communities and displaced civilians.³³ Moreover, it is also difficult for NGOs to execute those sensitive functions due to a weak constituency at the grassroots level. It is not easy for these peacebuilding organisations to mobilise local people affected by conflict to support their democracy-promotion efforts. The level of political literacy in the conflict zones is very low. Abstract concepts associated with normative liberal values like human rights and governance are not well known among most poor people in the Bangsamoro.³⁴ It is extremely challenging for NGOs to build a constituency at the community level and mobilise people to support their democratisation project. Their naming and shaming effort is likely to yield success when local people support it (Roth 2004). War affected civilians in Mindanao cannot be expected to support and accept ideas that they do not understand. They do not have a sufficient level of political education to create social pressures that demand transparency and accountability from local strongmen. It is also possible that people on the ground are even more dependent on the warlords than the NGOs, who will someday leave the conflict zone. Moreover, NGOs operating in the conflict zone are not in a position as act as a “surrogate public” (Roth 2004, 67) that can question the use of power of powerful politicians on behalf of the relatively powerless civilians. They are not equipped with sufficient power to critique the policies and actions of local strongmen in Mindanao. Instead, they are more inclined to preserve their working relationship with different power brokers and gatekeepers so that they can continue to operate in the region.³⁵

It is not safe and practical for NGOs in Mindanao to serve as a surrogate public because there is a strong tendency for local strongmen to become suspicious of NGOs as another contender for power. Watchdog and human rights NGOs are potentially destructive to the power of local

³² Confidential interview with an executive director of a research-based NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

³³ Confidential interview with a political anthropologist and NGO official, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

³⁴ Confidential interview with a sociology professor in the Mindanao State University and member of the Independent Decommissioning Body, General Santos City, 7 August 2016.

³⁵ Confidential interview with an executive director of a research-based NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

strongmen. NGOs that have a direct presence in the conflict zone are the strategic actors that can transmit information to international organisations and transnational NGOs, which then use the information to sensationalise human rights abuses and corrupt practices of powerful local strongmen (Meernik et al. 2012). These local strongmen might earn international condemnation if they fail to control and prevent locally based NGOs from exposing their anomalous transactions and human rights violations (Mitchell 2004). Hence, these power brokers, composed of warlord politicians and rebels in Mindanao, are cautious of the presence of NGOs in their respective bailiwicks.

Liberal peacebuilding relies on technocratic expertise

The complex landscape of power in the southern Philippines necessitates NGOs to harness technocratic expertise for them to engage in technical and sensitive aspects of liberal peacebuilding. Dealing with multiple power brokers in fragile environments like Mindanao requires NGOs to have the specialisation and expertise in performing their complicated and even dangerous liberal peacebuilding functions. These technocratic functions of NGOs in the southern Philippines include engaging with local strongmen, transforming rebels into political organisations, strengthening civil society organisations among marginalised groups, facilitating dialogues to address inter-ethnic and inter-clan wars, reforming the security sector, countering radicalism, and promoting transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms. In this research, I argue that only specialised NGOs have the capacity to carry out these highly technical peacebuilding activities in the southern Philippines. In the context of Mindanao, the term technocratic NGO refers to NGOs that have strong institutional capacities, and political and financial resources, which they can use as strategic leverage in dealing with powerful and hostile actors on the ground. They are members of the epistemic community because of their intellectual power to generate knowledge through scientific research based on their experiences in Mindanao. They are influential knowledge and policy entrepreneurs that drive the discourse and debate on peace and development in Mindanao. They have also established a solid partnership with various donor agencies that have an ongoing interest in financing peacebuilding operations in this war-torn region of the Philippines. It is also worth noting that these technocratic NGOs are not only acting as track one and two actors in a multi-stakeholder peacebuilding operation in Mindanao: some of them are clearly executing track three activities due to their ability to work directly at the grassroots level, where the actual armed skirmishes are occurring. Most of these specialised NGOs are transnational, with extensive experience in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in different parts of the world. Examples of these technocratic NGOs documented in this research are the HD Centre, TAF, Conciliation

Resources, Catholic Relief Services (CRS)³⁶ and KAS. The southern partner of KAS, the IAG is the only technocratic NGO that is locally based in the Bangsamoro.

The technical components of liberal peacebuilding are not only difficult to execute. These peacebuilding activities are expensive and require a huge amount of aid from donor agencies. For this reason, specialised NGOs have gained a comparative advantage over others, particularly small and local NGOs. They have earned the favour of donors due to their organisational capacity and expertise to deliver a variety of technical and expensive liberal peacebuilding functions in Mindanao. Most of the big donor-funded peacebuilding projects are implemented by these specialised NGOs. They are the favoured private service contractors commissioned by donors that, it is believed, can deliver the latter's democracy promotion projects like the European Union's flagship project on the development of political parties and civil society organisations in the Bangsamoro.³⁷

The ability to harness technocratic expertise has become a tactic of development NGOs in engaging with local strongmen and other powerful actors in the southern Philippines. Different power brokers in Mindanao are receptive to peacebuilding and democracy promotion efforts of the most specialised NGOs. These technocratic NGOs are well connected and have established strong networks with different sorts of power players in the conflict zone, particularly the warlord politicians, Muslim religious leaders and rebels. They do not pose a threat to the political status and prestige of power brokers. Instead, they are perceived as strategic partners that are beneficial in boosting the positive image and popularity of power brokers in the conflict zone. For example, the effort of the KAS in political party building in the Bangsamoro is helpful for the United Bangsamoro Justice Party of the MILF to build its public image and legitimacy as a political organisation.³⁸

The employment of technocratic expertise is an imperative for NGOs to penetrate complex power structures. However, NGO reliance on technocratic expertise creates another dilemma for liberal peacebuilding operation in Mindanao. Donors are inclined to support specialised NGOs that have the agency to harness technocracy through provision of foreign aid (Banks, Hulme and Edwards 2014). These specialised NGOs are important actors that legitimise the peacebuilding

³⁶ The CRS is a technocratic transnational NGO that has expertise in conflict transformation and acts as a track three actor due to its direct presence in the conflict zone.

³⁷ Confidential interview with a project manager of a German NGO, Makati City, 11 August 2016.

³⁸ Confidential interview with a senior leader of the MILF, Pigkalagan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao Province, 22 July 2016.

interventions of foreign donor institutions. Nonetheless, the preference of donors for technocracy as demonstrated in their overwhelming support for specialised NGOs is detrimental to the growth of civil society in conflict zones. In Mindanao, the rise of technocratic NGOs has trade-offs in the growth of civil society that promises social transformation at the grassroots level. It is disadvantageous to local NGOs that are not capable of competing with big and affluent transnational NGOs.³⁹ Locally based – especially homegrown – NGOs do not have the expertise and financial strengths of specialised NGOs. Most of them do not have staff who are equipped with skills in packaging proposals for funding, using the prescribed language or development jargon of different donors. Moreover, they are in a disadvantaged position in accessing funds due to their weak connections with decision makers in different donor agencies. Networks and linkages inside donor institutions are extremely important for NGOs to get money for their peacebuilding activities.⁴⁰

The rising tide of “technocracy” (see Mac Ginty 2012, 287) makes the liberal peacebuilding operation in Mindanao problematic. Liberal peacebuilding is expected to make way for the emergence of civil society in the conflict zone, which is necessary in the formation of local peace. Nonetheless, local NGOs representing grassroots civil society in Mindanao are dying or have become dysfunctional due to their inability to access aid from donors. Some homegrown NGOs, which have acquired a capacity that is comparable to that of technocratic NGOs, have become engrossed in making proposals following the templates and logical frameworks of donor agencies. Controversially, some of these homegrown NGOs are no longer making significant contributions to local peace formation by building the capacity of powerless civilians in the conflict zone. Writing proposals and reports that would please their donors have become the primary focus of some homegrown NGOs and their involvement in grassroots empowerment is minimal.⁴¹ Such homegrown NGOs are often based in Cotabato City and are controversially linked to the MILF.⁴² The inclination of donors to prefer technocratic expertise drives the attitudes of homegrown NGOs to emulate the image of specialised NGOs like TAF, HD Centre and KAS so that they can gain access to the lucrative peacebuilding aid industry in the region.

Too much emphasis on technocratic solutions in liberal peacebuilding is a major source of criticism against NGOs. According to scholars like Banks, Hulme and Edwards (2014, 707),

³⁹ Confidential interview with an executive director of a research-based NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

⁴⁰ Confidential interview with a country director of a European NGO, Pasig City, 9 August 2016.

⁴¹ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

⁴² Confidential interview, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

donors' disposition to reward NGOs with technocratic capability may facilitate the erosion of the "vibrant civil society necessary for structural change." NGOs have the tendency to abandon their major civil society functions of bringing political and social transformations in societies marred by violent armed conflict. They are more likely to execute the list of peacebuilding activities dictated by donors who have power to provide material rewards for cooperation and, thereby, compromise their independence as social organisations.

5.2 | Complex regimes, precarious security and paradoxes of liberal peacebuilding

I have previously explained the various tensions between liberal peacebuilding, which drives the peace operations of NGOs, and the complex configuration of power in Mindanao. In this section of the chapter, I will explain how the complex regimes and precarious security conditions in Mindanao complicate the peacebuilding operations of NGOs. I will analyse different circumstances under which NGOs perform functions that are beyond the scope of liberal peacebuilding or how NGOs produce and reproduce liberal anomalies.

The complex power configuration in Mindanao is a major influencing factor that complicates the civil society and humanitarian functions of peacebuilding NGOs. It is imperative to understand the realities that the complex power structure in conflict-affected communities of Mindanao places on NGOs and other peacebuilding organisations. The acknowledgment of these realities allows scholars and practitioners to come up with a more objective set of judgements on the performance of NGOs operating in contested political environments. The legitimacy of liberal peacebuilding operations in many conflict-prone and post-conflict communities is often criticised due to the absence of local ownership and lack of community-level consultations with people who are directly affected by armed conflicts (Newman et al. 2009). Different power brokers and gatekeepers in the conflict zone have strongly influenced the engagement of NGOs in peacebuilding operations. It is the contention of this research that NGOs are constantly confronted with limitations in performing their liberal-democratic functions due to socio-political pressures from local strongmen and other powerful actors. Hence, the peacebuilding interventions of NGOs in Mindanao are subject to local power forces.

Despite the strong presence of NGOs in the southern Philippines, they cannot be expected to generate transformative outcomes for peace in the short-term. Their agency for peacebuilding and democracy promotion in the conflict zone is considerably limited by the existence of an intricate

power structure that emphasises the dominance of local strongmen with multiple sources of power. Moreover, the precarious security conditions and weak imposition of the rule of law is another aspect of reality in Mindanao that obstructs the potential of NGOs to bring about transformation in conflict-ridden communities. The emancipatory strand of liberal peacebuilding that is espoused by scholars like Oliver Richmond (2010) and Roger Mac Ginty (2010) has limited power in Mindanao as seen in the performance and efforts of NGOs. Understanding the dynamics of power in the conflict zone and its impact on the liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs is necessary in coming up with realistic expectations and avoiding the imposition of demands on NGOs, which these actors cannot possibly meet.

The complications caused by the complex nature of power to liberal peacebuilding are empirically demonstrated in the paradoxes and ambiguities found in the actions and attitudes of NGOs in Mindanao. In this research, I argue that these paradoxes and ambiguities embedded in the liberal peacebuilding activities of NGOs are induced by underlying power relations in the conflict zone. In contested political environments, it is tactical for NGOs to renegotiate and hybridise modes of peacebuilding by combining elements of international liberal peacebuilding with domestic versions of peace (see Walton 2012). They cannot simply undermine extant institutions and beliefs on the ground as the local actors have the inherent ability to resist external epistemologies of peace (Mac Ginty 2010), particularly the elements that are threatening to their position and power. By doing so, it is impossible for NGOs to enter and work in conflict-prone areas of Mindanao due to security imperatives and imminent threats from local strongmen who are in possession of private armies. This research provides empirical evidence (see succeeding sections) on how NGOs have produced and reproduced contradicting and ambiguous versions of liberal peacebuilding when they localise the model on the ground. The following paradoxes and ambiguities found in NGO peacebuilding activities are based on the series of interviews I conducted for this research.

Engaging with illiberal actors

It is inevitable that NGOs operating in conflict-ridden Mindanao will engage with illiberal actors in implementing their liberal peacebuilding projects. Communities marred by violent armed conflict are under the control and rule of different sorts of illiberal and even hostile actors. Some of them have multiple sources and forms of power that have been extensively discussed in the previous chapter. Illiberal actors in the context of Mindanao include the warlord politicians, rebel commanders, religious and customary rulers in different parts of the region. They have their own bailiwicks in the conflict zone, where the ordinary civilians are loyal to them and recognise their

formal and informal authority as local rulers. In MILF-controlled communities, rebel commanders are acting as *de facto* government leaders who are following directives from the high-ranking officials in Camp Darapanan.⁴³ In geographically remote villages in the Bangsamoro, religious and customary leaders who are involved in the propagation of radical Islam are more influential than elected government officials. *Imams* or mosque leaders and *ustadz* or *madrasah* (Islamic school) teachers, for example, have frequent engagements with local people visiting the mosque to recite Quranic prayers.⁴⁴

In Mindanao, it is imperative for NGOs to interact, deal with and even enter into compromises with illiberal actors to bring their liberal peacebuilding agenda to the conflict zone. From the perspective of the international community, particularly donor agencies from the global north, NGOs are liberal peace agents who need financial support to carry out their liberal peacebuilding functions (see Wallace 1997; Lewis and Kanji 2009). Nonetheless, this liberal trademark of NGOs is called into question when they work with illiberal power brokers, who are common in conflict-prone communities. This interaction of liberal and illiberal actors in the conflict zone of Mindanao generates a major anomaly in the ontological description of liberal peacebuilding. NGOs cannot simply perform their peacebuilding and democracy promotion functions in strict conformity to liberal principles and norms. They have to take into consideration the complex power dynamics in different communities where they are operating, especially the competing interests of different power brokers. To some extent, NGO peacebuilding efforts and projects that are based on liberal normative standards have produced illiberal outcomes.

Controversially, local strongmen, especially warlords, have used liberal peacebuilding initiatives of NGOs to boost their popularity, power and legitimacy in the eyes of war-stricken people.⁴⁵ Local strongmen claiming ownership over liberal peacebuilding initiatives funded by donor money is an expected consequence of the NGO inescapable interaction with illiberal actors. Development projects and activities funded and implemented by NGOs are typically included in accomplishment reports of governors and mayors, although the latter make no substantial contributions. For example, the state of the province address of governors and the state of the municipality address of mayors in the ARMM are overlaid with projects that are implemented

⁴³ Confidential interview with a Muslim woman leader and consultant of Plan International, General Santos City, 30 July 2016.

⁴⁴ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

⁴⁵ Confidential interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

by NGOs. In some cases, the information signage or billboards include faces of these local politicians to inform the public about their initiatives. A marines officer shared that mayors and governors are often included in different peacebuilding activities and projects to build the trust of ordinary civilians in local government institutions.⁴⁶ The usual justification of local politicians for claiming ownership over development projects is that NGOs cannot operate in their bailiwicks without their support. For instance, mayors in the Maguindanao Province provide permission to NGOs to operate in their respective territories, so it is only appropriate for them to claim credit and boost their legitimacy using NGO projects.⁴⁷

Peacebuilding NGOs in Mindanao are aware of the danger of collaborating with illiberal and hostile actors. Indeed, they have a good level of understanding of the existing power dynamics in war-torn communities, especially those NGOs with long years of peacebuilding interventions and extensive networks in Mindanao.⁴⁸ However, engaging local rulers, rebel commanders and other power brokers in carrying out the liberal peace agenda of donors is the most viable mechanism for these NGOs to establish a presence in the conflict zone. Visibility of liberal actors on the ground is strategically important for the liberal epistemology of peace to take root and yield success in conflict-riven and post-conflict polities in the global south. From a pragmatic perspective, the contamination of liberal peace with illiberalism is not a crucial concern of most NGOs. Some of them are not even aware that they are facilitating the cohabitation or fusion of liberal and illiberal norms in the execution of their peacebuilding projects in Mindanao. This dilemma is particularly true among NGOs that are focused on service delivery and do not have sufficient capacity to unravel the ideational divide between liberalism and illiberalism. Their goal is simply to deliver goods and services to conflict-afflicted civilians according to the directives of their donors.⁴⁹

Ensuring organisational survival is an imperative for NGOs (Banks and Hulme 2012; Walton 2012) even to the point of allowing illiberal actors to interfere in their decision-making processes and modes of project implementation in the conflict zone. This interference is often disguised by NGOs using the rhetoric of participation and cooperation with local power holders as an effective strategy to entice donors to continually provide them with more peacebuilding funds. The crux of the matter is that they need the consent and protection from local rulers to perform their peacebuilding activities in conflict affected communities. Having constant access in war-torn areas

⁴⁶ Interview, Tawi-tawi Province, 13 January 2018.

⁴⁷ Interview with an academic in the Ateneo De Davao University, 19 January 2018.

⁴⁸ Confidential interview with an operation officer of UNICEF, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

⁴⁹ Confidential interview with a political anthropologist and NGO official, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

of Mindanao makes NGOs palatable to donors who reward them with aid money for their liberal peacebuilding interventions. The negative meddling of local strongmen and other power brokers in the peacebuilding operations of NGOs is what Oliver Walton (2012, 31) called the “uncomfortable trade-offs” that NGOs are willing to accept for the sake of their survival as major consumers of foreign aid. These compromises that NGOs are making on the ground are typically not reflected in their reports submitted to donors. NGO reports are packaged in a manner that meet the donors’ expectations and do not mention cases of hijacking or adverse interference by different power brokers in the conflict zone. Power brokers are represented as local partners who are adding value to NGOs’ peacebuilding efforts.⁵⁰ It is impractical for NGOs to demonise the image of local power brokers in their reports. They need to preserve their connections and relationships with the various power players for the safety of their staff and continued access to war-torn villages.⁵¹ According to respondents who are directly involved in the provision of public services, their NGO partners that are implementing health and sanitation services in Maguindanao are deliberately downplaying the negative interference of local strongmen in their operations and reports.⁵² They are aware of the prevailing culture of impunity enjoyed by local politicians who own private armies. Hence, reporting such undesirable act of local strongmen would certainly jeopardise the safety and welfare of NGO personnel working in the conflict zone.⁵³

NGO collaborations with illiberal actors in the conflict zone generates a clear paradox that delegitimises their identity as a major agent of the liberal peace, particularly from an academic perspective (see Walton 2012). Nonetheless, most NGOs in Mindanao are capable of justifying such a paradox or ambiguity in their actions in dealing with illiberal actors. A convincing justification presented by NGOs and even donors for why they deal with illiberal and hostile actors in Mindanao is the need to socialise these powerful individuals to liberal-democratic norms and practices. Donors have sufficient material power to enjoin NGOs to engage in the long-term process of norm diffusion by facilitating the constant exposure of local power brokers to liberal ideas. The socialisation of illiberal and hostile actors to liberal norms is aimed at generating behaviour change among them. In the long run, local illiberal power brokers may become champions, believers and advocates of liberal norms and ideas – a topic I will take up in the next chapter. The claims of NGOs to harness liberal norms (see Martinsson 2011; Collingwood 2006)

⁵⁰ Confidential interview with an academic and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

⁵¹ Confidential interview with an executive director of a research-based NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

⁵² Confidential interviews with three government officers in Maguindanao, General Santos City, 24 July 2016 and 3 August 2016.

⁵³ Confidential interview with an academic, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

in communities marred by intrastate conflicts grants these social organisations the comparative advantage of having constant access to Mindanao's lucrative peacebuilding aid industry (see Adriano and Parks 2013).

Finally, although working with illiberal actors constitutes an anomaly for the liberal identity of NGOs, it is also necessary to generate local legitimacy and cooperation of people at the grassroots. Ordinary civilians in different villages in the southern Philippines are loyal and typically follow the commands of their leaders. People's participation in NGO peacebuilding efforts and activities is contingent on the consent of their local leaders. Arguably, the participatory element embedded in NGOs' peacebuilding interventions in Mindanao is helpful in but largely artificial in generating some legitimacy. In most instances, conflict-stricken and poor people in the Bangsamoro do not participate in NGO activities of their own volition. They are merely subservient to their leaders, whether rebel commanders or warlord politicians, and obey their orders to participate and engage in various peacebuilding activities conducted by external actors like NGOs. Examples abound. Consent given to NGOs by warlord politicians is crucial for the former to execute their peacebuilding activities in the bailiwicks of the latter. War-stricken civilians basically cooperate with NGOs not only to benefit from peacebuilding assistance, but also because of the directives from their local rulers. For example, in MILF controlled communities, a clearance from rebel leaders in Camp Darapanan and local commanders is essential before NGOs can enter any stronghold communities of the rebel group. Consent from MILF leaders is also necessary to neutralise any negative suspicion of ordinary civilians towards NGOs working in their respective villages.⁵⁴ Some MILF supporters at the village level think that some NGOs have a mission of proselytising them towards Christianity,⁵⁵ and that the medicines and food items that they are distributing to people are contaminated with harmful substances, especially pork that is *haram* or forbidden in Islam.⁵⁶ In some instances, NGOs require permission from the hostile and radical BIFF through the use of social networks in order to work in remote villages overrun by bandits in the Maguindanao Province.⁵⁷ Therefore, although NGO engagements with illiberal actors demonstrate ambiguity and anomaly from the standpoint of the liberal peace paradigm, such engagement is a necessary, albeit uncomfortable, compromise for them to infiltrate the conflict

⁵⁴ Confidential interviews with two public school teachers from the Department of Education in Maguindanao Province, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

⁵⁵ Confidential interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

⁵⁶ Confidential interview with a Muslim woman leader and consultant of Plan International, General Santos City, 30 July 2016.

⁵⁷ Confidential interviews with two public health physicians from the Department of Health in Maguindanao Province, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

zone with their peacebuilding interventions. The complex configuration of power and the precarious security environment in Mindanao are part of local realities that apparently compel NGOs to accommodate elements of illiberalism.

Reinforcing and sustaining informal institutions

As agents of the liberal peace, NGOs involved in peacebuilding and statebuilding are expected to engage primarily with formal state structures that are sanctioned by normative liberal democratic ideas and principles. NGOs' collaboration with state agencies and adherence to formal rules are imperatives for their legitimisation as peacebuilders and promoters of democracy (Collingwood 2006). Hedley Bull (2002) in his book *The Anarchical Society* claims that the actions and attitudes of great global powers are in observance of internationally agreed norms and principles. Western powers, in particular, are the champions of propagating liberal democracy as a universal norm that would drive the attitudes of states. IGOs, particularly the United Nations and the European Union have become prominent and aggressive actors in promoting normative liberal ideas and practices, especially in the area of international peacebuilding (Philpott 2012; see also Richmond et al. 2011). Hence, as with powerful states and IGOs, conformity to cosmopolitan norms, principles and rules is also essential for NGOs in order to bolster their international legitimacy. It is beneficial for them to be integrated into the lucrative foreign aid industry that is supportive of NGO statebuilding efforts through democracy promotion in conflictual societies (Abiew and Keating 2004). It is a prescription for liberal NGOs to engage and help states in building formal institutions of democracy to facilitate development and to resolve underlying causes of armed conflicts. Nonetheless, as seen in the context of Mindanao, NGOs cannot escape the need to engage and deal with various informal institutions and practices in the conflict zone.⁵⁸

The inescapable influence of local strongmen on NGOs operating in Mindanao illustrates another ambiguity in the latter's identity as a liberal peacebuilding agent. Local rulers in different localities in the southern Philippines are the operators of informal institutions, which are necessary to preserve their power and to sustain their legitimacy from the perspective of people at the grassroots. An informal institution is a loosely framed concept and encompasses multitudes of meanings. For the purpose of this research, I confine the discussion to informal institutions and practices, which are identified in the scholarship of Helmke and Levitsky (2004), to illustrate the argument that the *modus operandi* for NGO peacebuilding accommodates various informalities in

⁵⁸ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

this conflict-ridden region. These informalities are clientelism and patronage networks, corruption, patrimonialism and clans. Nonetheless, I am aware of the fact that there are other informal institutions and practices that also mediate in the peacebuilding operations of NGOs in the southern Philippines.

Clientelism and patronage

Clientelism and patronage politics are the most obvious informal institutions that have a major influence on the liberal peacebuilding and democracy promotion projects of NGOs in the region. Peacebuilding NGOs are largely aware that clientelism and the employment of patronage networks are part of the rules of the game in war-torn communities there. From a liberal-democratic perspective, patron-client relationships are detrimental to the growth of genuine democracy in contested political environments. They defeat the very notion of equal and open participation of people in the political affairs of the state. Clientelism and patronage politics facilitate the exclusion (Stokes 2013) of powerless groups, especially minorities who do not belong to the same ethnic or blood lines of local strongmen. They are often considered as political opponents or non-supporters of power brokers. In reality, NGOs operate in an undemocratic manner by allowing local rulers to entrench clientelism and patronage in the execution of their liberal peacebuilding projects. Controversially, warlord politicians and rebel commanders have a strong influence over the selection of villages where the NGO projects are going to be implemented, or in the selection of beneficiaries. For example, it is a common practice in many conflict-prone *barangays* in Mindanao for some community-based water system infrastructure to be constructed on the land of village chiefs, who control the use of the facility. In some localities, there are ordinary civilians who are prohibited from drawing water from the *barangay* water system simply because they are not supporters of the ruling village chiefs.⁵⁹ By allowing clientelism and patronage to drive liberal peacebuilding efforts, NGOs earn the trust and consent of local strongmen, which is strategic for their continued presence in the conflict zone. In all, although the beneficiaries of the NGO peacebuilding interventions are chosen by the patrons, the NGOs justify it on the basis of their claim that these people are poor and victims of armed conflict in Mindanao.

In their reports to donors, NGOs generally do not mention elements of clientelism and patronage that are embedded in their peacebuilding operations. Instead, the negative impacts of these informal practices on liberal peacebuilding are filtered and sanitised in NGO reports and are

⁵⁹ Confidential interview, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

usually described as collaboration with local stakeholders in the conflict zone. Local rulers are often portrayed as local partners and not as patrons who are using NGO peacebuilding activities as a tool to bolster their legitimacy by giving favours to clients who are maybe grappling with extreme poverty that is aggravated by armed conflict. From the standpoint of people at the grassroots level, NGO peacebuilding investments are part of the local rulers' "economic monopoly over goods" (Stokes 2013, 4). The only way to access NGOs' resources is by pledging political support and loyalty to the local strongmen. The complex power structure in the region makes NGO peacebuilding goods and services part of the political largesse of local rulers and other illiberal power brokers in these war-prone communities.⁶⁰ Community-based infrastructures, such as multi-purpose buildings and post-harvest facilities that are funded under the multi-million-dollar ARMM Social Fund administered by the World Bank, are concrete examples of how local strongmen capture peacebuilding projects.⁶¹

In most cases, donor institutions do not check or verify the veracity of reports they receive from NGOs. It is dangerous for them to visit conflict-affected villages in Mindanao to monitor NGOs that are acting as their service providers. NGOs tend to overlook the negative trade-off of allowing clientelism and patronage in their peacebuilding operations.⁶² They place high priority on the need to implement donor-funded projects, especially delivery of relief services and aid goods for the war-stricken people of Mindanao. The political conditions in the conflict zone need to be favourable for the NGOs. They require consent from various power brokers to provide aid in this situation of complex emergency in Mindanao.⁶³ Without such consent, the NGO span of coverage and services would be very limited due to the aforementioned security dilemma facing external peacebuilders. Moreover, a wide array of NGOs working in Mindanao is advantageous for local power brokers to reinforce their "political monopoly over goods" (see Stokes 2013, 4). This means that they can facilitate access to employment for people who are loyal and subservient among different NGOs operating in the conflict zone. Patronage compromises meritocracy and competence. Nonetheless, NGOs also take advantage in giving jobs to people who are recommended by local politicians, rebel commanders and religious leaders.⁶⁴ These people constitute strategic channels that link NGOs with different power brokers. For instance, in MILF

⁶⁰ Confidential interviews with two public health physicians from the Department of Health in Maguindanao Province, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

⁶¹ Confidential interview, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

⁶² Confidential interview with an executive director of a research-based NGO, Davao City, 8 July 2016.

⁶³ Confidential interview with a political anthropologist and NGO official, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

⁶⁴ Confidential interviews with two public school teachers from the Department of Education in Maguindanao Province, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

communities in the southern Philippines, local staff of NGOs are often composed of rebel commanders or their close relatives who can safely travel in war-inflicted and rebel-controlled villages.⁶⁵ Although working within informal institutions complicates the liberal peacebuilding operations, it is a strategic and practical mechanism for NGOs to infiltrate complex power structures and manage the security imperative in Mindanao. Most NGOs are willing to downplay the detrimental impacts of clientelistic and patronage politics in the conflict zone as long as they can deliver their commitments to donors. This is because peacebuilding NGOs in Mindanao are generally dependent on donors' money,⁶⁶ which is a key to their organisational survival (see Walton 2012).

Corruption

Corruption is a major and controversial practice that obscures the liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs in the region. It is also an important and common issue in contested political communities that are transitioning from war to peace, and for actors that are engaged in peacebuilding operations, particularly donors and NGOs (Cheng and Zaum 2011). Widespread corruption in peacebuilding operations drains resources from international funding agencies (Richmond 2009). Countries that are marred by intrastate and inter-ethnic conflicts are featured prominently in global corruption surveys. For instance, in the 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index, the Philippines ranks 101 alongside other conflict-affected states in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand and Timor-Leste (Transparency International 2017). Continual insecurity induced by the existence of domestic armed conflicts constitutes a conducive landscape for “pervasive corruption”, due to the weak capacity of the state to enforce the rule of law, and weak social norms that demand transparency and accountability (Cheng and Zaum 2011, 1). In communities with an active armed conflict like Mindanao, donors have a strong inclination to provide continuous foreign aid in order to finance conflict resolution and the democracy-promotion efforts of various peacebuilding organisations, particularly NGOs (Adriano and Parks 2013). Nonetheless, using their observations in Afghanistan, Wilder and Gordon (2009) present negative trade-offs in the huge influx of foreign development assistance and the donors' desire to distribute aid money immediately. According to Wilder and Gordon, this attitude of donors towards the disbursement of foreign aid generates broad incentives and opportunities for powerful actors to engage in

⁶⁵ Confidential interview with an operation officer of UNICEF, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

⁶⁶ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

corruption. In the southern Philippines, warlord politicians' involvement in corruption related to peacebuilding aid is noted in the writings of Lara (2010).

Controversially, some peacebuilding NGOs have become instrumental in the graft and corrupt practices of local rulers in the southern Philippines. The participation of NGOs in dubious corruption schemes of local power brokers presents a sharp contradiction to their liberal-democratic function. Ideally, NGOs are expected to perform their civil society duty by fighting corruption and promoting good governance (Richmond 2009). However, it has become almost impossible for NGOs to counter corruption and oppose power brokers who perpetuate such illegal transactions, particularly in disbursing aid for conflict prevention, resolution and rehabilitation of war-devastated communities that favours the latter's interests. Based on a confidential interview with a Moro civil society leader, corruption in the Bangsamoro has become rampant because, despite clear and strong evidence, it is tolerated by political leaders such as those discovered by a group of NGOs in the Department of Education-ARMM (see Chapter Four). Indeed, the Philippines country director of the International Alert, Francisco Lara (2010), asserts that the lucrative peacebuilding aid industry in Mindanao has become a new source of politico-economic power of warlord politicians.

Corruption as an informal practice is deeply entrenched in Bangsamoro politics. NGOs are not in a strong position to resist and fight the corrupt practices of local power brokers. They are compelled to compromise a certain portion of their aid projects by giving a share to local politicians or rebel commanders. Hence, to some degree, NGOs have to allow local power brokers, particularly local politicians, to compromise their peacebuilding funds.⁶⁷ The practice of bribery among NGOs and international organisations is not an exclusive phenomenon to the southern Philippines. These peacebuilding organisations that have operations in conflictual societies in many other parts of the world are necessitated by the circumstances to pay so-called "speed money," which is paid by NGOs to local power brokers to secure some form of licence to operate in the territories of the latter (Cheng and Zaum 2011, 14). In Mindanao, international NGOs are more prone to pressure from local actors. Local politicians and rebel commanders perceive them as affluent organisations and well-funded by big donor agencies, like the World Bank and the European Union.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Confidential interviews with two development workers in the Bangsamoro, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

⁶⁸ Confidential interviews with two public school teachers from the Department of Education in Maguindanao Province, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

The complexity of the terrain of power and perilous security conditions is favourable for the culture of corruption to be continually perpetuated in Mindanao's peacebuilding sector. Because of the grave danger of monitoring the utilisation of peacebuilding aid in the conflict zone, actors involved in peace operations are drawn to orchestrate corruption. An academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro made a controversial claim against some NGOs in Mindanao. According to him, NGOs, local politicians and rebel commanders form an 'unholy trinity' when engaging in orchestrated corruption. He claimed that,

the NGOs, local politicians and rebel commanders are playing around the conflict situation in Mindanao and all of them are benefiting from it. They know well how to orchestrate the reality of displacement of people in the conflict zone. When a rebel commander launches an offensive attack against a military detachment, it causes massive displacement of civilians. The displacement of people from their respective villages constitutes a sufficient justification for local politicians to utilise the calamity funds of local government units and for NGOs to request foreign aid from donors. Once the emergency and relief funds become available to local politicians and NGOs, they share some portion of it to the local commanders who are responsible for the displacement of civilians. Sharing of government funds and donors' money among NGOs, local politicians and rebel commanders is part of the power game in Mindanao.⁶⁹

This controversial claim about the existence of an 'unholy trinity,' which refers to the collusion of NGOs, local politicians and rebel commanders, may be anecdotal, yet the participation of some peacebuilding NGOs in corruption has been confirmed by other expert respondents in this research who have long careers in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the southern Philippines.⁷⁰ Rampant corruption is prevalent in both post-conflict and conflict-prone communities. Peacebuilders, including NGOs, have a tendency to deliberately misappropriate peacebuilding funds. According to Ryan (2016, 123), aid that is intended to help people affected by violence and war can be funnelled to "sustain warlords and the structure of violence they operate within." In some instances, peacebuilding aid is simply disbursed for other purposes that are not helping powerless victims of armed conflict. Moreover, there have also been an accusation

⁶⁹ Confidential interview, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

⁷⁰ Based on multiple interviews.

against NGOs of exaggerating the number of war refugees or internally displaced persons to get more funds from donors (Shearer 2000).

Clan and kinship politics

It is imperative for NGOs to interact with clan-based politicians who form a powerful informal institution in the Bangsamoro. As discussed in the previous chapter, ethnographic evidence indicates that political power in the Bangsamoro is in the hands of around forty-one political families (see Table Two). Mindanao's strongmen with multiple sources of power often emanate from these political clans who have established bailiwicks and strongholds in different localities in the southern Philippines (Espesor 2017a). The scholarship of Helmke and Levitsky (2004) and Collins (2002) on the role of informal institutions in politics demonstrates that powerful clans often dictate the rules of the game in conflictual societies. Clans prescribe norms within their respective territories and these norms form part of the universe of informal rules, particularly in contested political environments. The influence of clans on local politics in conflict-affected communities is also true in the case of Mindanao. Politics in the southern Philippines has been labelled as family enterprises of powerful warlord politicians.⁷¹ Ronald Simbulan (2007), who is an expert in political dynasties and warlordism in the Philippines, aptly describes the politics in Mindanao as "*Kamag-anak* Incorporated", which literally means kins' business. Political clans, especially those with bailiwicks in the conflict zone, appear to have the sole and exclusive franchise of political power in the Bangsamoro. Likewise, external actors, particularly peacebuilding NGOs operating in their political domains, are subject to informal rules set and determined by warlord politicians.

In the southern Philippines, NGOs typically utilise clan-based structures in the delivery of peacebuilding aid in conflict-affected villages. In some cases, the permission of a mayor of the town is not sufficient for NGOs to implement a project like a water system for the community: the approval of the whole clan of the ruling mayor is needed by NGOs before they can implement any development projects in the conflict zone. Controversially, in some municipalities in the Bangsamoro, the incumbent elected mayors are mere representatives of their clans in politics. The real holders of power and the decision makers are the members of their nuclear families.⁷² Official policies and actions of the local government organisations are usually deliberated and determined

⁷¹ Confidential interviews with two development workers in the Bangsamoro, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

⁷² Confidential interview with a government officer in the Bangsamoro, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

in private residences of political clans. Hence, it is no longer a surprise to see NGOs operating in the war zone making official transactions with local politicians in their respective houses and not in the municipal halls. Paying visits to politicians' private residences is the most practical approach for NGOs to gain access and engage with these key local power brokers. Absentee government is commonly observed in many towns in conflict-ridden Mindanao. Mayors and other municipal officials do not normally go to the office and perform their official duties as public servants.⁷³

It is inevitable for NGOs to interact with clan networks on the ground. Support from clan-based networks controlled by local strongmen is necessary for NGOs to work safely in the conflict zone and engage with conflict-affected civilians in their peacebuilding efforts. In conflict-prone societies with fledgling democracy, informal kinship-based networks dominate political life (Collins 2002). In most cases, informal rules eclipse those of formal ones as these rules are enforced by local rulers whose authority and legitimacy emanate from both informal and formal structures. External actors, particularly NGOs, are in a way compelled to take advantage of working within the kinship structures of local rulers in Mindanao. It is practical for NGOs to tap existing kinship structures in conflict zones in the delivery of peacebuilding aid. In seemingly feudal and conflict-prone societies, there is a scarcity of indigenous civil society organisations that can be mobilised by donors and NGOs to attend to the needs of vulnerable groups (see La Cava and Nanetti 2006; Collins 2002). Mindanao is highly communal, where social norms and rules of engagement are solely determined by a warlord *datu*, who is most of the time an elected political leader, or his family. Unlike a liberal democracy setting, which emphasises individual rights and freedom, in Mindanao, it is an imperative for all external peacebuilding players to engage with and respect the authority of local rulers. Otherwise, it would be almost impossible for NGOs to perform their peacebuilding activities in the Bangsamoro outside the clan-based structures of local politicians or even rebel commanders.⁷⁴

Peacebuilding NGOs utilise the clan-based structure in their operations in Mindanao. They recruit staff from the families of local strongmen and rebel leaders who can take advantage of the existing kinship structures at the community level. It is also observed that the local NGOs whose leaders

⁷³ Confidential interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

⁷⁴ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

are from influential clans and have blood ties with MNLF and MILF leaders have the comparative advantage of accessing peacebuilding aid from donors.⁷⁵

The culture of nepotism within NGOs is not an exclusive phenomenon in Mindanao. It is also widely practiced in other settings (see Haque 2011). Moreover, it can be surmised that most of the transactions and negotiations of peacebuilding NGOs with political clan leaders and rebel commander take place in closed spaces, where only a few people make decisions as to the manner of project implementation and selection of beneficiaries. Controversial examples abound. In a certain town in the Bangsamoro, NGOs are required to secure the approval of the so-called ‘three sisters’ before they can implement projects. These ‘three sisters’ are siblings of the elected mayor and they are not politically elected officials of the town. Although they do not have the formal legitimacy to make decisions, they are considered more powerful than their brother, who is the town mayor. Hence, NGOs and other external organisations that are operating in their bailiwicks are often compelled to negotiate and deal with the ‘three sisters’ and accept their terms and conditions.⁷⁶ Moreover, there are many local NGOs in the Bangsamoro whose personnel come from the same family. Some prominent Muslim NGO leaders in the southern Philippines are relatives of MILF leaders and commanders.⁷⁷

Tapping clan-based structures presents a danger where peacebuilding efforts of NGOs are prone to being hijacked by a small number of power brokers in the conflict zone. It creates an opportunity for powerful individuals to facilitate inclusion of their relatives and political supporters in NGO peace initiatives and, at the same time, exclude non-clan members and political opponents.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, informal kinship structure can also be helpful for NGOs in delivering aid to conflict and poverty-stricken population in the Bangsamoro. As long as the NGOs are under the protection of political clans, they can freely and safely perform their peacebuilding functions within the respective territorial domains of the clans.

In summary, the complicity with the power structures and the unstable security conditions in Mindanao complicate the liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs. Peacebuilding organisations are in a way compelled to accept uncomfortable trade-offs of accommodating and working within the structures of informal institutions that exist in the conflict zone. The *modus operandi* of NGOs

⁷⁵ Confidential interview with an operations officer of UNICEF, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

⁷⁶ Confidential interview with two high-ranking government officials, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

⁷⁷ Based on multiple interviews.

⁷⁸ Confidential interview with a government officer in the Bangsamoro, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

of allowing clientelism and patronage, corruption and clan-based politics to influence and shape their peacebuilding efforts generates paradoxes or contradictions in their identity as liberal peace agents that are expected to deal primarily with formal state institutions. Nonetheless, NGOs cannot escape the reality in the southern Philippines that the only way for them to establish a presence and perform their peacebuilding functions safely is to negotiate and enter into compromises with various local rulers, particularly warlord politicians and rebel commanders. This research supports the claim of Lauth (2000) that in insecure environments, there are needs that only informal institutions can meet and satisfy. Therefore, the intricate power relations in Mindanao reduce the liberal value of NGOs as they are compelled to function illiberally as the need arises in the conflict zone. In addition, NGOs contribute to sustaining patrimonialism, which is another form of informal institution and is discussed further in the last section of this chapter.

Securitising liberal peacebuilding

Another ambiguity in the role of NGOs as agent of the liberal peace is their latent contributions to the securitisation of peacebuilding in the southern Philippines. Some groups in the conflict zone have suspicions that NGOs involved in peacebuilding operations are not mere humanitarian and development actors, devoid of any politico-security agenda.⁷⁹ They are agents mobilised by western countries to gather intelligence information in war-torn Mindanao.⁸⁰ Therefore, the public perception in conflict-affected communities towards peacebuilding NGOs is not entirely positive. The perception of people at the grassroots towards external actors is largely influenced by local power brokers. Warlords and rebel commanders typically filter and sanitise the information that reaches the ground about the motives of foreign peacebuilding players, particularly INGOs from Europe and America.⁸¹ Hence, the manner in which people at the community level engage with NGOs is in deference to directives from their leaders, and in some ways, it is local leaders who provide legitimacy to NGOs, not NGOs providing legitimacy to local leaders.

Suspicion and distrust among the local population and power brokers towards international organisations, foreign donors and NGOs is a common phenomenon in conflictual societies (see Gheciu 2011; Sitter and Parker 2014). These external peacebuilding players, particularly NGOs,

⁷⁹ Confidential interview with a development worker and former rebel fighter, Pigkalagan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao Province, 22 July 2016.

⁸⁰ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

⁸¹ Confidential interview with a Muslim woman leader and consultant of Plan International, General Santos City, 30 July 2016.

are confronted with the accusation that they are acting as “shadow peacebuilders” who engage in “diplomatic counter-insurgencies” (Kostic 2017, 120) and counter-terrorism (Sitter and Parker 2014) in conflictual societies. They are deployed in the conflict zone not simply to deliver humanitarian relief assistance and facilitate conciliatory dialogues among people affected by armed conflict: they are part of the liberal peacebuilding infrastructure that is designed to contain conflict and promote stability in conflict-prone societies in the global south (see Newman 2011). Nonetheless, it is possible that most NGOs are not aware that they are performing functions that are geared towards the securitisation of the liberal peacebuilding operations in the southern Philippines. Most of them are apparently carrying out technocratic functions, which Roger Mac Ginty calls “routine peace” (2012, 287). NGOs tend to focus on peacebuilding activities that are dictated by their donors, without the need for becoming critically informed of the latter’s security agenda in Mindanao.

In a precarious environment like Mindanao, peacebuilding NGOs are prone to carry out ambiguous functions. On the one hand, they act as an agent for human security that affords basic social protection and attends to the urgent needs of conflict-stricken civilians, while on the other hand, they take the role of securitising agent to combat radicalism and extremism in conflict-affected areas. Most of the NGOs operating in Mindanao have focused on the provision of alternative social services to impoverished communities owing to the failure of local governments in the area of service delivery.⁸² However, some NGOs, particularly those with transnational networks and based in the United States and Europe are actively involved in the securitisation of peacebuilding operations in Mindanao. These NGOs typically have extensive and diversified peacebuilding programmes in different provinces in the Bangsamoro. Their counter-terrorism agenda is not explicitly expressed and known to local actors in the conflict zone. NGO humanitarian motives and conciliatory peacebuilding activities constitute a tactical façade to conceal their security interest in the southern Philippines. According to an intelligence officer, two INGOs are popular in Mindanao for their wide array of peacebuilding efforts, but they are also engaged with a clandestine intelligence organisation within the AFP for its counter-terrorism campaign.⁸³ These INGOs are part of the epistemic community that is deeply interested in knowledge production on security issues in conflictual societies, including the subnational conflict community of Mindanao.

⁸² Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

⁸³ Confidential interview, General Santos City, 2 July 2016.

There is a strong justification for external players to securitise their peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao. This war-torn region of the Philippines provides a safe haven for the most notorious terrorist organisations in the world, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, Al-Qaeda and IS (see Abuza 2014; Liljas 2016, 14 April). In 1995, the attempt to detonate bombs in a number of US commercial aircraft was planned in the Philippines (Mylroie 2003). Although it was a failed terrorist operation, the plan served as a prototype for the 9/11 World Trade Centre and Pentagon attacks by Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and Ramzi Yousef (Houvenaeghel 2015; Mylroie 2003). The conflict-marred communities of Mindanao are strategic places for combat and tactical training of insurgent and terrorist groups due to the lack of government control (Houvenaeghel 2015) and the ineffective imposition of the rule of law by the Philippine government throughout the country (Dolorfino 2008). It is also reported that the MILF is hosting and harbouring Al-Qaeda linked Jemaah Islamiyah jihadists within its own territory (Houvenaeghel 2015). Controversially, Abuza (2005) claims that radical jihadist recruits were given foreign training on how to manufacture bombs and weapons, on sabotage, surveillance, communication and cell formation – not in Al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, but in MILF administered camps in the jungles of Mindanao. Recently, *Time* magazine reported that the leader of Abu Sayyaf in Basilan, Isnilon Hapilon had pledged allegiance to the IS. He is also the new leader of IS in the Philippines (Liljas 2016, 14 April). Therefore, it is a security imperative for western states to devote careful attention to Mindanao. “No country can be dismissed as irrelevant to security” (Freedman 2006, 74). According to Krasner (2004), despite their limited material capability, transnational terrorists based in poor countries have the power to threaten the security of great powers as evidenced by the 9/11 attacks.

The securitisation of foreign aid compels its users, especially INGOs to participate in the ‘war on terror,’ which was the defining feature of American foreign policy during the Bush Administration (Freedman 2006). It is enticing for NGOs to engage in a securitised mode of peacebuilding in the global south because of the material rewards from liberal donors. Duffield (2001) asserts that international actors employ peacebuilding as a basic tool to manage disorganisation in conflict-prone regions in the post-Cold War and market-orientated liberal global order. In Mindanao, the role of NGOs in the securitisation of peacebuilding operations is not obvious; nevertheless, some are suspected of serving as underground operatives that feed intelligence information to foreign states.⁸⁴ They are deployed in the conflict zone, not only to alleviate the dismal condition of the conflict-stricken communities, but also to promote stability and to contain conflict in Mindanao. Hence, the peacebuilding efforts of NGOs are not only meant to bring about peace and

⁸⁴ Confidential interview with an intelligence officer, General Santos City, 2 July 2016.

development: they are also designed to counter transnational terrorism and prevent the further growth of radicalism and extremism.

In recent years, there has been a growing presence of IS-inspired groups in the southern Philippines. Some influential local religious figures, like the *ustadz* and *imams*, are involved in the propagation of radical points of view about Islam. These religious leaders receive funds from various charitable institutions and NGOs in Saudi Arabia and Iran, who support *dawah* (proselytising or preaching of Islam) in the southern Philippines.⁸⁵ The *ustadz* and *imams* have a strong potential to introduce and promote radical Islam in conflict-ridden Mindanao. Many Muslim people at the community level interact with these religious leaders at least five times a day when they visit the mosques to pray. Some argue that sectarian violence is likely to erupt soon in Zamboanga City and Maguindanao Province due to the presence of such local norm entrepreneurs who are involved in radicalising Muslim individuals and families.⁸⁶

To counter the emerging threats from radical groups in Mindanao, some technocratic NGOs are creating platforms for participation of people in the democratic process. For instance, KAS and IAG pay special attention to engage the Bangsamoro youth in their political party development initiative. These NGOs see the need to offer choices and opportunities to young Muslim individuals to participate in liberal-democratic processes, so that they will not be attracted to embrace terrorism and extremism out of political frustration.⁸⁷ Some NGOs in Mindanao are supported by their liberal donors to counter the narrative on Islamic radicalism that is propagated by illiberal NGOs from the Middle East. Therefore, NGOs' are not mere humanitarian and development actors; they also contribute to the securitisation of peacebuilding operations in Mindanao, which further complicates their role as agents of the liberal peace.

5.3 | Double-edged sword: aiding powerless civilians and reinforcing the prestige and power of local strongmen

The intricate configuration of power and constant insecurity in the southern Philippines has obscured the contributions and value of NGOs as peacebuilders and development actors. The activities of peacebuilding NGOs are a double-edged sword in that they bring both harm and good to the conflict-stricken population in the conflict zone. They can be a force for good that provides

⁸⁵ Confidential interview with an academic in Mindanao, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

⁸⁶ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

⁸⁷ Confidential interview with a project manager of a German NGO, Makati City, 11 August 2016.

immediate assistance to poor and conflict-displaced civilians during complex emergencies.⁸⁸ They can also create and expand the public sphere to accommodate participation of powerless and excluded groups in democracy.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, NGOs have a dark side that is potentially detrimental to the building of democratic institutions in Mindanao. They are prone to manipulation and control by local power brokers, and they are compelled to accept uncomfortable trade-offs so that they can safely operate on the ground. Moreover, some NGOs in Mindanao do not conform to liberal peacebuilding. They are agents of forms of radicalism which aims to propagate the idea of militant Islam in the southern Philippines. This section of the research argues that NGOs have made significant contributions to provide aid to conflict-stricken and powerless civilians. However, they also reinforce the prestige and legitimacy of powerful local rulers and support militant leaders in promoting radicalism in the Bangsamoro. Evidence is elaborated in the succeeding sections.

Force for good: helping marginalised and excluded groups

Decades of armed skirmishes between the security forces of the Philippine government and various insurgent and terrorist groups have led to extensive marginalisation and exclusion of largely powerless civilian communities in Mindanao. This dismal reality in the conflict zones is aggravated by the existence of dysfunctional governance and weak capacities of state actors to aid civilians during the outbreak of armed hostilities. In the academic literature, NGOs are seen as an important prodemocracy force that protects and promotes the welfare and interests of groups that are experiencing marginalisation and exclusion (Banks et al. 2015). The interventions of peacebuilding NGOs in Mindanao for marginalised groups may not have a solid impact on democratisation, but they are crucially important at least, to afford basic social protection to these war-stricken civilians. Foreign governments and international donor agencies are able to provide humanitarian and relief services to war-devastated communities through NGOs. Based on ethnographic field observation, I have noticed that peacebuilding NGOs have mostly focused on helping three excluded groups: IDPs, indigenous peoples, and women and children. It is not the contention here that the issues of marginalisation and exclusion are exclusive to these groups.

⁸⁸ Confidential interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

⁸⁹ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

Internally displaced persons

Forced displacement of civilian populations and human victimisation are major consequences of violent civil conflicts (Newman 2004; Cohen and Deng 1998). In the southern Philippines, NGOs pay a considerable amount of attention to helping communities that are permanently and partially uprooted from their respective villages due to intermittent outbreaks of armed confrontation. According to the International Displacement Monitoring Centre of the Norwegian Refugee Council,⁹⁰ over four million people in Mindanao were displaced between 2000 and 2005. As of May 2015, it was reported that about 119,000 people in the southern Philippines were still in a state of displacement due to a series of military operations and retaliatory attacks from various non-state armed groups. Around 70% of the IDPs are from the ARMM (see Table 6), a region in Mindanao where most of the skirmishes are taking place. Table Six shows that the phenomenon of war-induced displacement of people is also observed in other parts of Mindanao.

Table 6. Current number of IDPs in Mindanao (as of May 2015)

Region	Number of People	Percentage
ARMM	81,000	68 %
Western Mindanao	33,500	28 %
Northern Mindanao	300	-1 %
Central Mindanao	4,000	3 %
Total	118,800	

Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2015)

The alarming phenomenon of internal displacement, especially in the ARMM, is sufficient justification for NGOs to get involved in humanitarian relief operations. There is a widespread consensus among respondents in the research that many NGOs operating in conflict-prone areas in Mindanao are focused on relief management and distribution of aid goods to displaced civilians. NGOs that perform multiple functions, such as governance, health and education, are also doing relief operations for communities displaced by war. The major contribution of NGOs in peacebuilding in Mindanao has been the provision of humanitarian and relief assistance to conflict-affected civilians. Anthropologist and development worker at the IAG, Professor Rey Danilo Lacson, claims that relief operations have become the cottage industry of NGOs in Mindanao.⁹¹ Most NGOs do not have diversified expertise in peacebuilding, as their activities are exclusively

⁹⁰ The IDMC is an independent non-government humanitarian organisation based in Norway. It is recognised and endorsed through a resolution of the UN General Assembly. For more information on the report of displacement of the IDMC, visit its official website at <http://www.internal-displacement.org/south-and-south-east-asia/philippines/figures-analysis>.

⁹¹ Interview, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

focused on the distribution of relief aid to IDPs. NGOs not only provide relief assistance to people in evacuation centres, but also in communities that are vulnerable to intermittent fighting, particularly the towns in Maguindanao Province. For example, the towns of Mamasapano and Ampatuan receive relief aid on a regular basis from different international organisations and NGOs.⁹² Moreover, NGOs tend to give more assistance to communities that have more frequent experience of armed fighting over less conflict-prone localities in the ARMM.⁹³

The severity of internal displacement in Mindanao has been a constant source of motivation among NGOs to engage in humanitarian and relief operations. In the ARMM, displacement of civilians due to armed conflicts is aggravated by the frequent occurrence of natural disasters, particularly flooding, which are not usually mentioned in media reports.⁹⁴ NGOs are seen as an important complementary force that augments the manpower and financial capacities of local and national governments in responding to the needs of thousands of people who have fled their homes and relocated to different evacuation centres. The provision of humanitarian assistance to IDPs is the greatest strength of most NGOs in the southern Philippines.

Indigenous Peoples

The members of different indigenous cultural communities in the southern Philippines are susceptible to the harsh impacts of armed conflicts. Aside from the Moro or Muslim people, the IPs who are residing in different localities in the Bangsamoro and its neighbouring provinces have been experiencing frequent displacements from their ancestral lands. Based on the report of the UNHCR (2015, 10), more than 8,000 IPs remain internally displaced and cannot return to their respective villages due to security issues. For this reason, relief operations of NGOs have targeted the IPs as recipients of basic goods, such as food and clothing. Moreover, the marginalisation of the IPs, who are “minorities within the minority” in the Bangsamoro (Rood 2014), is a controversial and complex issue. They are the frequent victims of human rights abuses, especially land grabbing and extra-judicial killings, which are allegedly committed by some politically influential people in Mindanao. NGOs provide humanitarian relief assistance to displaced IPs, such as food, medicines and tarpaulins to make temporary shelters.⁹⁵ Very few NGOs in Mindanao

⁹² Confidential interviews with two anonymous public school teachers from the Department of Education in Maguindanao Province, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

⁹³ Confidential interviews with two public health physicians from the Department of Health in Maguindanao Province, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

⁹⁴ Confidential interview with a senior military official and assistant secretary at the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, General Santos City, 18 August 2016.

⁹⁵ Confidential interview with a tribal chieftain of the Arumanen-Manobo tribe in North Cotabato, Davao City, 23 April 2016.

have the capacity and expertise to safeguard and protect the human rights of the members of the indigenous communities. It is also extremely dangerous for most NGOs to get involved in issues of land dispossession and extra-judicial killings confronting the IPs in the southern Philippines.⁹⁶

Women and children

Women and their children are among the most affected groups and suffer the worst consequences of the cyclical phenomenon of protracted armed conflicts and natural disasters. The confluence of armed hostilities and environmental hazards often led to widespread displacement, malnutrition among children, poor health and unclean water supplies (UNICEF 2011). In conflict-affected areas in Mindanao, humanitarian assistance from the Philippine government, international organisations and NGOs are heavily geared towards the protection of women and children.

Relief goods, such as food packages and medicines, are usually given to displaced women who are acting as heads of the family while they are residing in evacuation centres. Some of the women work for cash and do voluntary service for humanitarian organisations and NGOs involved in relief operations. In Mamasapano and Ampatuan, for instance, mothers are mobilised and encouraged by NGOs to take part in nutrition programmes for children. They are tasked to cook and provide vegetables for malnourished children. NGOs assist them in the establishment of their own community and school gardens so that they can have a constant supply of vegetables to address the problem of malnutrition among children in their communities.⁹⁷ NGOs operating in Mindanao see the urgent need to promote the welfare of children who are affected by armed conflicts. The 2009 Joint Emergency Nutrition and Food Security Assessment of the Conflict-Affected Persons in Central Mindanao of the UNICEF and World Food Programme (WFP) shows that the prevalence of acute malnutrition among children in war-ravaged communities is 9.6% (UNICEF 2011, 1).

Humanitarian NGOs in Mindanao pay considerable attention to alleviating the plight of children living in evacuation camps and in villages, who have constant exposure to violence. Different types of activities, ranging from restoration of classroom buildings to psychosocial support for children, are undertaken by these NGOs. As observed, NGO interventions for children affected by war are

⁹⁶ Confidential interview with the ARMM focal person of the Philippines National Anti-Poverty Commission, Davao City, 23 April 2016.

⁹⁷ Confidential interviews with two public school teachers in Maguindanao, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

focused on education, health and sanitation. School children are the regular beneficiaries of relief goods from NGOs and different international humanitarian agencies.⁹⁸

These activities of NGOs for IDPs, IPs, and women and children may be palliative and do not have any significant and immediate impacts on democracy promotion. However, the provision of humanitarian assistance to conflict-ridden populations is a confidence-building measure, which is strategic for NGOs in building a positive image and in reinforcing their legitimacy. War-weary civilians, especially children, are indirectly sensitised to the idea that NGOs and their external donors are necessary actors in bringing peace to Mindanao. The constant exposure of people to NGOs and donor agencies is a long-term tactical mechanism for the diffusion of democratic norms and values in war-ridden Mindanao (see Chapter Six).

Dark side of NGOs: reinforcing pre-existing conflict, sustaining patrimonialism and propagating extremism

NGOs are doing good by helping powerless and conflict-stricken civilians in the southern Philippines. However, not all NGOs are necessarily good. Some governments and international organisations have raised critical questions about their legitimacy as development organisations (Van der Borgh and Terwindt 2012). According to Abiew and Keating (2004), there is evidence that NGOs peacebuilding operations generate unintentional consequences. Mary Anderson claims that although “NGOs do not generate conflicts, they sometimes contribute to and reinforce violent conflicts pre-existing in societies where they work” (quoted by Smock 1996, 2). Such a claim is also true in Mindanao. For example, the current tension between the MILF rebels and influential local politicians in Mindanao has been exacerbated by NGOs. Local power brokers, particularly the mayors and governors, have accused some big and influential NGOs of favouritism in proffering favours to the MILF, because this group is currently negotiating a peace deal with the Philippine government. Consequently, governors and mayors of Mindanao are threatened with the possible rise to power of MILF leaders. These local power brokers are in control of private armies, which they can use to destroy the present peace negotiation if it is detrimental to their current interests and power.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Confidential interviews with two public school teachers in Maguindanao, Polomolok, South Cotabato, 29 July 2016.

⁹⁹ Confidential interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

NGOs tend to focus their peacebuilding programmes on fostering economic development in rebel communities and building the capacities of MILF leaders for democratic governance. Hence, local power brokers perceive these peacebuilding interventions of foreign donor agencies and NGOs as a boon to the MILF for their commitment to resolving the Mindanao conflict through a peaceful political settlement.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, NGOs aim to deliver aid and facilitate peacebuilding dialogues at the grassroots. Nevertheless, their interventions sometimes bring about unintended outcomes at the level of the community. Abiew and Keating (2004), argue that NGOs may reinforce tensions among groups and clans when they provide peacebuilding aid to some groups and not to others.

In Mindanao, NGOs provoke tensions among political clans, particularly at the *barangay* level. For instance, a political clan in Maguindanao is alarmed and threatened when NGOs collaborate and negotiate with another rival family. NGO resources are often seen as a political commodity that can be used to increase the popularity of local politicians to the detriment of their political opponents. Some NGOs are not aware that they are causing intergroup tensions, which are dangerous due to the prevalence of horizontal violence driven by *rido* or family feuds.¹⁰¹

NGOs operating in conflictual societies reinforce pre-existing conflict and intergroup tensions; they are sometimes also prone to compromise their independence and neutrality when providing emergency relief services to war-ridden populations. This dilemma is due to extreme competition for political power among various power brokers and gatekeepers on the ground (Abiew and Keating 2004). NGOs are working under pressure from their donors to deliver aid services for people in the conflict zone. To meet donors' demands and expectations, they are sometimes compelled to accept some uncomfortable trade-offs by working with powerful local actors, such as warlords and rebels in the conflict zone. These local actors are taking advantage of NGOs' peacebuilding efforts to bolster their public image and enhance their prestige and legitimacy. They typically claim credit for permitting NGOs to operate within their bailiwicks or controlled territories.¹⁰² In societies that are fledgling democracies, NGOs are susceptible to operating within the "reserve domains" and "patronage networks" of authoritarian elites (Van der Borgh and Terwindt 2014, 21).

¹⁰⁰ Confidential interview with a senior military official and assistant secretary at the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, General Santos City, 18 August 2016.

¹⁰¹ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

¹⁰² Confidential interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

It is inevitable for NGOs to interact with power structures in the conflict zone. In some instances, they may be compelled to choose sides, and hence, sacrifice their neutrality (Van der Borgh and Terwindt 2012). By allowing the negative meddling of local power brokers in their peacebuilding operations, NGOs create contradictions in their roles as civil society actors and liberal peace agents. They are expected to facilitate democratisation that advances social justice and eliminates all forms of patrimonialism, the patronage system and clientelism (Szántó 2016; Offiong 2013). In reality, NGOs cannot escape the detrimental influence of these informal institutions. Some NGOs do not have explicit awareness that they are already operating within the clientelistic networks of powerful local actors. Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (2002) assert that it is hard for NGOs to spot and eliminate extant patronage networks. In the southern Philippines, ethnographic evidence shows that NGOs are reinforcing and sustaining the power, prestige and legitimacy of local rulers, particularly warlord politicians and rebel commanders who are using patronage structures in the preservation of their powers.¹⁰³ In partial or weak democracies like Mindanao, clientelism dictates the policy about “who gets what” (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2002, 6). Because NGOs utilise clientelistic structures on the ground to help civilians, they also grant consent to local powerful patrons to exploit their peacebuilding efforts. These patrons are in advantageous positions to hijack the projects of NGOs in extending political favours and material incentives to their loyal clients. Non-supporters are often marginalised and excluded. For example, consent from the Ampatuan clan is crucially important for NGOs to operate in their bailiwicks in Maguindanao, and permission from local commanders is an imperative for NGOs to deliver peacebuilding projects in MILF-controlled communities.

Moreover, some NGOs in the southern Philippines have been accused of being involved in unscrupulous transactions in connivance with local politicians and rebel commanders. These dubious activities of NGOs include misappropriation of peacebuilding aid¹⁰⁴ and deliberately serving the political and economic interests of local rulers and other power brokers in the conflict zone.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, NGOs’ peacebuilding efforts have minimal impacts in promoting democracy in Mindanao; instead, they reinforce and sustain the power of and confer anomalous legitimacy on local rulers who are mainly warlord politicians.

¹⁰³ Confidential interviews with two public health physicians from the Department of Health in Maguindanao Province, General Santos City, 3 August 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Confidential interview with a civil society leader in the Bangsamoro, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

Finally, a controversial dark side of some NGOs in Mindanao is their participation in the propagation of Wahhabi and Salafi extremist ideology (Germann, Hartunian, Polen and Mortela 2016). I have previously explained that peacebuilding NGOs are mobilised for counter-terrorism campaigns of the Philippine government in Mindanao and the western states. Nonetheless, this war-torn region of the Philippines has been infiltrated by Islamic NGOs, such as the International Islamic Relief Organisation and Muslim World League (see Abuza 2003, 22, 92), which are allegedly supporting terrorist organisations in Mindanao. These Islamic NGOs are said to be taking advantage of the growing disaffection and disillusionment of young people in the Bangsamoro to engage in *mujahidin* and terrorist activities. The *imams* and *ustadz* who are influential religious leaders on the ground are the local agents tapped by Islamic NGOs in radicalising young people.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, these Islamic NGOs are accused of financing terrorists in Mindanao by using local humanitarian NGOs as a front that provides relief and livelihood assistance to poor Muslims in Mindanao (Germann et al. 2016). They are also financially supporting various *madrasah* (schools) that are an ideal venue for *damab* or Islamic propagation. Madrasah are influential local institutions which inculcate sometimes radical Islamic values among the local Muslim population in Mindanao, especially among children and youth.¹⁰⁷ The use of NGOs for Islamic propagation is common in societies with a substantial Muslim population (see for example, Riaz 2014). These Wahhabi-Salafi-inspired NGOs are forces against liberal democracy; they are active in the conflict zone to propagate a militant version of Islam in the southern Philippines.

5.4 | Concluding thoughts

Liberal peacebuilding is an exogenous epistemology of peace that drives the peacebuilding operations of NGOs and donor agencies in the southern Philippines. This peacebuilding framework has gained prominence and global popularity as it is promoted and endorsed by influential liberal IGOs and donor governments. Nonetheless, when it is transported by donors and NGOs into Mindanao, it is not accepted and appreciated in a straightforward way by people in the conflict zone. Its interaction with local socio-political forces creates tensions on the ground. Mindanao, like other conflictual societies is not a “virgin territory” where foreign ideas and values can easily be propagated without resistance and opposition (Newman et al. 2009, 23). There are pre-existing power structures and extant beliefs and institutions that have their own version of

¹⁰⁶ Confidential interview with an academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Confidential interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

endogenous peace formation and conflict resolution. Different power brokers in Mindanao have the capacity to impose resistance against external actors, especially NGOs and donors who are promoting the liberal peace paradigm on the ground. Consequently, liberal peacebuilding is modified and customised to accommodate current political realities in the southern Philippines and for NGOs as agents of the liberal peace to work safely in this perilous terrain of conflict. Hence, the interface between the exogenous liberal paradigm of peace and local peace formation illustrates the hybridity of peacebuilding operations in Mindanao that is supported by different international donor agencies, IGOs and NGOs.

Foreign donors and IGOs are able to transport and localise aspects of liberal peacebuilding in the southern Philippines through the provision of aid to various liberal NGOs. These NGOs are commissioned by the former to serve as private service contractors that deliver a wide range of services for conflict-stricken civilians in Mindanao. Nevertheless, the promotion of a liberal-democratic version of peace by external actors, like NGOs, is seen as a hegemonic imposition of western ideas and values that are incoherent or even detrimental to pre-existing local normative structures and interests in the conflict zone. Various forms of tensions are generated because liberal peacebuilding has the inclination to reshape local power structures in post-war and conflictual environments. The ultimate goal of liberal peacebuilding is to facilitate the creation of more democratic spaces and construct platforms for participation of powerless groups in the conflict zone. Despite its emancipatory intention, liberal peacebuilding is confronted with resistance on the ground from different local authoritarian leaders. The inclusion of powerless groups in the public sphere is the redeeming aspect of liberal-democratic peacebuilding; however, if effective, it also means dilution of the power of Mindanao's local strongmen, who are mainly warlord politicians. Preserving the state of powerlessness of marginalised groups within the conflict zone is strategic for the preservation of power and legitimacy of local rulers in conflictual societies under the complex political order. Thus, local strongmen perceive liberal-democratic normative values as harmful and threatening to their current political status and power in Mindanao.

The complex configuration of power and precarious security conditions in the southern Philippines generates different dilemmas for the liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs and other liberal peacebuilding players. First, the western epistemology of peace that aims to aid democratisation is a grave threat to the power and legitimacy of warlord politicians. The opening of more democratic spaces is necessary to facilitate transition in Mindanao after decades of violent

armed conflicts. However, it also means the possible emergence of actors who might vie for political power against warlord politicians in a free and democratic election. Local strongmen with multiple sources of power tend to be averse to the accommodation of a competitive democratic exercise, particularly elections. The rise of possible competitors in politics is an affront to their political status and legitimacy and a huge threat to their power.

Secondly, local rulers pose resistance to liberal peacebuilding because they see peacebuilding as empowering insurgent groups. These power brokers feel that they have been side-lined, and their power and influence were undermined when the Philippine government signed the FAB and CAB with the MILF. They have the impression that the donor community and NGOs are giving large incentives and material rewards to the MILF due to their desire to resolve protracted conflict in Mindanao through a peaceful political settlement. It is clear that donors and NGOs are giving preferential treatment to the MILF. Most of their current peacebuilding interventions are geared towards the socio-economic development of MILF-controlled territories and to building the capacity of rebel leaders for political leadership and governance in the Bangsamoro. For this reason, warlord politicians are an obstacle to liberal peace agents, particularly NGOs, who tend to build the power base of insurgent leaders.

Thirdly, NGOs' liberal peacebuilding operations have a minimal impact on democratisation in Mindanao. This dilemma is largely caused by the existence of a complex power configuration and ongoing security problems confronting NGOs in the conflict zone. Due to pressure and security threats from various local power brokers, NGOs are more inclined to perform less complicated and non-threatening components of liberal peacebuilding, such as emergency and relief operations, poverty alleviation, and non-formal and community-based education for people affected by armed conflict. These activities are used by NGOs to gain leverage with local rulers and rebel commanders so that they can safely operate in the war zone. Hence, NGOs participate in the game of power that in turn bolsters the power of local strongmen in this contested political environment in the southern Philippines.

Fourthly, pre-existing local power forces in Mindanao have reductive effects on liberal peacebuilding operations. As agents of the liberal peace, NGOs face a dilemma in performing their highly sensitive and dangerous functions. Due to constant insecurity and threats, very few NGOs in Mindanao are in the position to execute extremely important liberal peace functions such as human rights monitoring and protection and combatting corruption through governance reforms

and election monitoring. These important components of liberal peacebuilding are hard to carry out due to the lack of security guarantee and weak imposition of the rule of law by the state.

Finally, liberal peacebuilding operations in Mindanao are criticised for relying too much on technocratic expertise. Technical aspects of liberal peacebuilding that include engaging with Mindanao's local rulers or political gatekeepers, transforming rebels into legitimate political actors, strengthening civil society organisations among marginalised groups, facilitating dialogues to address inter-ethnic and inter-clan wars, reforming the security sector, countering radicalism, and promoting transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms are exclusive to influential and affluent specialised NGOs. This emphasis on technocratic solutions generates dilemmas because local NGOs are gradually dying as they cannot compete with technocratic NGOs that have the comparative advantage of securing peacebuilding aid from donors. To some extent, technocracy has become counterproductive to liberal peacebuilding operations particularly in its aim to facilitate the emergence of civil society in the conflict zone. Small NGOs in Mindanao are starting to shut down, or they have become dysfunctional due to their poor capacity to secure funding from donors, who prefer to mobilise well-established and technocratic NGOs. Although the rise of technocracy in peace operations in Mindanao is detrimental to the growth of community-based civil society, it is an effective mechanism used by technocratic NGO to penetrate complex power structures and to engage with hostile power brokers in the conflict zone. Technocratic solutions like political party development carried out by NGOs are beneficial to local power players as they enhance the prestige and bolster the legitimacy of local strongmen.

The peacebuilding operations of NGOs in societies under a complex regime and in a precarious environment are inundated with a wide array of complications and contradictions. The complex configuration of power and precarious security in Mindanao generates major paradoxes and ambiguities in the liberal functions of peacebuilding NGOs. Some conditions on the ground compel NGOs to perform functions that are beyond the scope of liberal peacebuilding and that present anomalies, while still acting as liberal peace agents. The complex architecture of power in the conflict zone forces NGOs to engage with illiberal and hostile actors. It is imperative for NGOs to deal and interact with various illiberal power brokers like warlord politicians, rebel commanders, religious and customary rulers in different communities in Mindanao. Although engaging with illiberal actors presents contradiction to the NGOs' roles as agents of the liberal peace, it is a practical way for them to establish a presence and deliver services in the conflict zone, despite the danger of an active armed conflict.

NGOs in Mindanao are deeply embedded in local power structures and politics. They operate in the conflict zone using various informal institutions that sharply contradict their liberal identity. NGOs work within the clientelistic and patronage networks of different power brokers, especially warlord politicians and rebel commanders. These informal institutions are strategic in engaging local populations, who are loyal to their patrons, in NGO peacebuilding efforts in the conflict zone. Corruption is another informal practice that constitutes a paradox in liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs. Some NGOs are known to be fraudulent agents of the liberal peace. They are a vehicle in misappropriating peacebuilding aid in collusion with local rulers and rebel commanders in Mindanao. They are part of the unholy trinity who are benefiting from the lucrative peacebuilding industry in Mindanao. Moreover, NGOs see the need to accommodate clan-based politics, which is the most powerful informal institution in the Bangsamoro. Social norms and rules of engagement in seemingly feudal Mindanao are dictated by local strongmen whose power and legitimacy come from both official and traditional grounds. Hence, it is inevitable for NGOs to tap the kinship structure of local rulers; otherwise, it would be difficult for them to work in the conflict zone. The greatest consequence of using informal kinship-based networks in peacebuilding operations is that NGOs are sometimes compelled to accept some uncomfortable trade-offs, where local rulers can hijack and capture their peacebuilding activities. In short, NGO peacebuilding activities that are based on liberal normative standards facilitate the production and reproduction of illiberal outcomes for peace in Mindanao.

The involvement of NGOs in the securitisation of liberal peacebuilding constitutes a major ambiguity in their role as humanitarian and development actors. There is a growing suspicion and distrust among local populations and various power brokers that NGOs are mobilised by IGOs and donor governments to gather intelligence from the field. Some American and European NGOs are accused of being “shadow peacebuilders” (Kostic 2017, 120) that are deployed in Mindanao as an integral part of the counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism campaigns of the Philippine government and the international community. The controversy around securitising the liberal peacebuilding operations in Mindanao arises out of the presence of notorious and radical terrorist organisations, like Abu Sayyaf, Al Qaeda and IS, which pose a threat to global security.

Finally, NGOs are a double-edged sword that produces beneficial contributions and, at the same time, harmful impacts for peace and democracy in Mindanao. On the one hand, NGOs are a force for good. They have significant achievements in aiding the marginalised and excluded groups that

are most vulnerable to the harsh impacts of violent conflicts. NGOs are praised for empowering powerless civilians, especially the indigenous peoples, IDPs and women and children. Their humanitarian and relief services are of great help to these powerless groups due to the limited capacity of the Philippine National Government to afford basic social services to civilians during the outbreak of armed hostilities in Mindanao. Moreover, NGOs are filling the gap in the delivery of social services created by the prevalence of absentee government at the local level. These efforts of NGOs for marginalised groups may not have a strong impact on democratisation. Nevertheless, it is vital at least to afford minimum basic social protection to war-stricken civilians. NGOs are still the primary channel of humanitarian and relief assistance in the southern Philippines for foreign governments and international donor agencies.

Not all NGO activities in Mindanao are necessarily good. Some of them have recognisable dark sides that are detrimental to liberal-democratic peacebuilding. Their negative attributes include reinforcing pre-existing conflict, sustaining patrimonialism and propagating extremism in the southern Philippines. It is not the intention of NGOs to generate conflict, but sometimes they reinforce pre-existing violent conflict in communities where they are working. In Mindanao, their peacebuilding efforts sometimes reinforce pre-existing tensions between warlord politicians and rebels, and among warring political families at the village level. Another dark side of NGOs is due to their inability to counter the negative meddling of local rulers in their operations. As a consequence, they inadvertently reinforce the power and legitimacy of local patrons, instead of challenging them to act in a democratic fashion. Local rulers characteristically hijack the peacebuilding initiatives of NGOs to bolster their popularity and local prestige. They also determine who should be included and who should be excluded from the services provided by NGOs in their respective bailiwicks. Lastly, not all NGOs that are operating in Mindanao are agents of the liberal peace and schooled in liberal-democratic ideology. Some of them, allegedly, are actively involved in the propagation of Wahhabi-Salafi extremist ideology, which calls for the rise of militant Islam and encourages sectarian violence. Such illiberal NGOs may be using humanitarian and charitable activities as a front to channel funds to various terrorist organisations and recruit *mujahidin* fighters among young individuals in Mindanao. Therefore, to perceive NGOs as an independent force for good is misleading. It is more appropriate to see them as power players capable both of doing good and of bringing harm in communities under complex regimes marred by violent conflicts.

Chapter VI

NGOs, Power Transformation and Liberal Norm Diffusion

Democracy building requires the reshaping of the existing power structures in contested political environments with a strong legacy of violent conflicts. The transformation of power is critically significant to the facilitation of long-term and sustainable outcomes of peacebuilding and it is necessary to justify the democratisation investments of various liberal peace agents, including NGOs. It is important for peacebuilding players to foster the understanding among warring parties that violence, such as the use of force and coercion, is not the ideal route to power. Democracy promotion requires considerable efforts to cultivate the idea in the minds of the public of the necessity and utility of using the electoral system as the ultimate and legitimate means of acquiring political power in a post-conflict scenario. From a liberal standpoint, the trust and confidence of conflict-affected civilians and different power brokers in the electoral process are crucial to facilitate democratic consolidation in societies recovering from a longstanding conflict.

Helping to consolidate democracy amidst an active armed conflict in the southern Philippines is an extremely difficult task for IGOs and NGOs. The primary challenge confronting these democratisation agents is how to transform complex power structures that underpin the concentration of power in the hands of warlord politicians in Mindanao. The goal of transforming power in the conflict zone is to facilitate the emergence of a pluralist democratic society to accommodate the participation of various sectors in the political affairs of the state, particularly the marginalised and excluded groups in Mindanao (see Figure 9). As noted in the previous chapter, the dominant peacebuilding tool utilised by donors and NGOs in democracy promotion is liberal peacebuilding. NGOs perform a wide range of peacebuilding activities that are mostly inspired and guided by liberal peace theory. They are mobilised by different donors as service providers in a seemingly privatised peacebuilding operation, in which peace is seen as a valuable commodity (Carey 2012).

In peacebuilding, particularly in the context of intrastate conflict, liberal peace agents devote significant attention to the promotion of democratic norms and values in conflictual societies to achieve long-term outcomes for peace through the establishment of democratic institutions. These

institutions of democracy, according to Richardson (2012), contribute indirectly to the attainment of peace, as they encourage cooperation and promote a sense of shared interests among actors involved in conflict. In Mindanao, peacebuilding actors are actively involved in attempting to diffuse liberal norms and ideas despite the on-going atrocities and precarious security conditions in this region of the Philippines. Norm diffusion has become a democratisation tool of IGOs and NGOs with the aim of achieving a sustainable peace that has eluded Mindanao for decades. Moreover, a smart and subtle diffusion of liberal-democratic norms is a strategic mechanism to manage dilemmas of liberal peacebuilding operations and lessen resistance from local power holders.

Democratic consolidation in Mindanao is likely to be achieved when liberal actors are successful in promoting a normative socio-political order that favours the emergence of a pluralist democratic post-conflict society. This requires the dispersal of political power from the hands of a few privileged warlord clans and rebel groups, making it available and accessible to various powerless groups who have been subordinated and marginalised due to armed conflicts and extreme poverty. Deconcentrating power in the conflict-affected communities in Mindanao is an enormous and dangerous task for democratisation agents, particularly peacebuilding NGOs. Any attempt to alter the intricate power structure in the conflict zones breeds resistance from traditional political leaders, who benefit from the existing status quo. Although difficult and sometimes perilous, it is imperative for democratisation agents to challenge and transform the complex power relations in the southern Philippines. This also means that in promoting democracy, liberal agents are expected to facilitate the inclusion of minority and disenfranchised groups into the political arena. This means that they do not only advance and support the interests of the already powerful warlord politicians and rebel leaders. NGOs in Mindanao have a tendency to concentrate a lot of their peacebuilding efforts in ways that support powerful groups, such as the transformation of the MILF into a political party.¹ The building of positive relationships with politicians and rebel leaders is a tactical mechanism of NGOs to enable them to operate continually in the dangerous terrains of conflict in Mindanao. Moreover, donors have the constant desire to finance NGO activities that seek to build the capacities of local politicians and rebels in governance and public management.

¹ Interview with a programme manager of the Institute for Autonomy and Governance, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

As discussed in Chapter Five, it is clear that NGOs are the major democratic players and are adhering to the liberal peacebuilding framework. Although their peacebuilding functions demonstrate complexities and ambiguities, NGOs are acting as norm entrepreneurs, mobilised by the international donor community in the diffusion of liberal norms and values to make way for democratic consolidation in Mindanao. Owing to their presence on the ground and extensive networks with various power brokers in the conflict zone, NGOs are the best-suited peacebuilding players to transport and promote western democratic ideas and practices. This chapter of the thesis explains the process whereby NGOs facilitate the transformation of power through norm diffusion in conflict-affected communities in the southern Philippines. Specifically, I will devote significant attention to providing answer to the research question: How do NGOs diffuse and localise transnational liberal ideas and norms in conflict-ridden Mindanao?

In this chapter, I will analyse the process of diffusion of transnational norms and ideas using Mindanao as the case study, with a specific focus on the European Union (EU). Among all external actors, the EU focuses the most on norm diffusion to reinforce the so-called Normative Power Europe (NPE) (Manners 2002) and has no compelling military interest in the southern Philippines as the Americans, Australians and Chinese have. The EU's engagement in Mindanao is useful to understand how donors commission NGOs to act as entrepreneurs of liberal norms while they engage in peacebuilding and democracy promotion in the conflict zone. The EU is one of the biggest of the donor agencies involved in the multi-stakeholder peacebuilding operations in the southern Philippines. It mainly employs soft approaches to peacebuilding and conflict resolution and presents itself as a civilian or normative power there (Houvenaeghel 2015). Moreover, the EU is the only major donor institution that does not have a ground presence and is almost entirely dependent on its partner NGOs to carry out its peacebuilding projects in Mindanao.

This chapter starts with a comprehensive discussion of the underlying motivations of the EU in Mindanao and its liberal agents for norm diffusion. This is to set out the context and explain how the EU is deeply involved in peacebuilding as a normative or civilian power in the southern Philippines. The succeeding section aims at analysing the relative importance of mobilising NGOs in diffusing transnational ideas and norms, and their processes for localising external liberal norms in Mindanao. Then it proceeds to identify different groups that are the targets of the localisation of liberal norms and to analyse the reactions of local actors, especially those of local strongmen, to norm diffusion. In the last section, I will discuss the time frame of norm diffusion and present concurrent tendencies of norm diffusion in Mindanao.

6.1 | EU motivations in Mindanao

The EU is not merely a humanitarian organisation contributing a tremendous amount of foreign aid just to bring peace in the southern Philippines. EU involvement in the peace operations is based on its multifaceted interests. Firstly, the EU has clearly articulated its economic agenda in the Philippines, particularly the inclusion of war-torn Mindanao into the global market economy. Secondly, although there are no EU troops deployed in Mindanao, the EU has transnational security interests in the southern Philippines due to the presence of terrorist and extremist groups that are closely associated with the Islamic State (see Figures 5 and 7). Thirdly, the peace process in Mindanao is strategic to the EU's geopolitical projection as a neutral and peace-loving great power with no apparent imperialist ambitions in Mindanao.

According to the EU, Asia is the “most dynamic region in world trade” and includes important strategic trading partners for the Union (European Union 2016a, 12). Asia represents the globe's fastest growing economies and is presently the EU's largest trading partner. Asia is also considered to be the hub of global commercial activity, hence crucial for the growth and prosperity of the European economy. For the EU, peace and stability should be preserved in Asia in order not to hamper its economic activities. There is a concern that intra-regional trade between the EU and Asia could be disrupted by the emergence of conflict, especially in conflict-prone communities in Southeast Asia (see Houvenaeghel 2015). Thus, it has become an imperative for the EU to engage in peacebuilding in Asia, including the Philippines. The EU-Philippine trade relationship is based on the 2012 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. In 2014, the total bilateral trade in goods between the EU and the Philippines was EUR 12.5 billion or roughly USD 13.18 billion. The EU is the fourth-largest trading partner of the Philippines, while the latter ranks as the EU's sixth largest trading partner in the Asian region. Moreover, among all foreign states, the EU has the greatest direct investments in the Philippines, amounting to EUR 6.1 billion in 2013 (European Commission 2017a).

The EU is quite transparent regarding its agenda and motives in Mindanao. In a media interview on 9 December 2015, EU Ambassador to the Philippines, Franz Jessen, stressed that human rights promotion and trade are the primary interests of the EU in the southern Philippines. He added that it is in the interest of the EU “to increase European presence in the Philippines.” He strongly emphasised the importance of peace and stability in the country to attract European companies to do business in the Philippines. European business firms are eyeing the underrepresented manufacturing sector of the Philippines as a potential area for greater investments (*Philippine Star*

2015, 14 December). According to Hendrik Mollenhauer from the German NGO partner of the EU, KAS Philippines, this liberal trade economic agenda of the EU in Mindanao is no secret:

after decades of war in Mindanao, the Philippines would do better if there is peace in that region. Mindanao has lots of resources that are important for future trade. As long as security is a problem down there, investors would not be interested to do business.²

This quote shows that the EU's partner NGOs are very much aware of its motivations and agenda in light of its growing presence in Mindanao. Like other major international donors in Mindanao, the EU is very much interested in the abundance of natural resources in there, particularly strategic minerals, which can be utilised for future trade, when there is peace and stability. One such resource site is found in the Ligawasan Marsh, which provides a safe haven for rebel and terrorist organisations in the Bangsamoro. This is a resource-rich area sought after by many international actors, such as Japan, Australia, the USA and the EU states, all of whom are involved in the peace operations in Mindanao.³

Although the EU does not demonstrate 'hard' military power in the Philippines, it has a manifest security interest in Mindanao. The instability in this region has generated a wide array of politico-economic security repercussions around the world. The protracted nature of the conflict is detrimental to the prospective socio-economic and tourism investments in Mindanao. Investors, particularly European businessmen, have strong reservations against engaging in trade activities due to the ever-present threats of terrorism, armed conflicts and kidnapping in this part of the Philippines (Dolorfino 2008). This fear has been exacerbated by the kidnapping of a Norwegian and an Italian by militant groups in Mindanao in 2015 (EU Ambassador Franz Jessen quoted in *The Philippine Star* 2015, 14 December). In the following year, 10 Indonesians and two Canadians were held captive by the Al-Qaeda linked Abu Sayyaf group (Liljas 2016, 14 April).

Rampant kidnap-for-ransom activities and beheading of hostages are not the only concerns of the EU in the southern Philippines. This region of the country is a potential hub of terrorist and extremist organisations, particularly Jemaah Islamiyah and Al-Qaeda in Southeast Asia. For instance, the attempt to blow up a dozen US commercial aircraft was planned in the Philippines

² Interview, Makati City, 11 August 2016.

³ Interview with a commanding general of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and cabinet official, General Santos City, 18 August 2016.

in 1995 (see Mylroie 2003). Although it was a failed terrorist move, the plan served as a prototype of the 9/11 World Trade Centre and Pentagon attacks by Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and Ramzi Yousef in 2001 (Houvenaeghel 2015; Mylroie 2003).

The conflict-marred communities of Mindanao are strategic places for combat and tactical training of insurgent and terrorist groups due to the lack of government control (Houvenaeghel 2015), and the ineffective imposition of the rule of law by the Philippine government throughout the country (Dolorfino 2008). It is also reported that the MILF is hosting and harbouring Al-Qaeda linked Jemaah Islamiyah jihadists within its own territory (Houvenaeghel 2015). These radical jihadists were given foreign training on the manufacture of bombs and weapons, sabotage, surveillance, communication and cell formation, not in Al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, but in MILF-administered camps in the jungles of Mindanao (Abuza 2005). Recently, *Time* magazine reported that “extremism has taken its roots” in Mindanao and a growing number of Moro outfits have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Isnilon Hapilon of the Abu Sayyaf took an Islamic name, Shiek Mujahid Abu Abdullah al-Filipini as the newly appointed leader of Islamic State in the Philippines (Liljas 2016, 14 April). Therefore, it can be inferred that the EU considers the complexities of the armed tensions in Mindanao to be a transnational security imperative, which is a major concern of western states at present.

The involvement of the EU in peacebuilding in Mindanao is strategically beneficial in reinforcing its aim for greater geopolitical projection. The EU seeks to create a new image, as a supranational organisation, which has the capability not only to foster economic development in impoverished regions of the world but, as well, to export peace as a commodity to conflict-stricken communities from its headquarters in Brussels. From a realist perspective, Mindanao has become a major “theatre of action” (Aron 2003, 54) of the EU as one of the great powers on the global stage. It endeavours to compete for international prestige like other foreign donors, such as Japan, the USA and Australia, who have established their presence in the southern Philippines.⁴ The EU is employing a ‘soft approach’ in the demonstration of its material, human and financial agencies in Mindanao’s security and development sector. According to Houvenaeghel (2015), the EU has a positive image in Mindanao as a key peacebuilding player with no military interest: hence it is perceived as a neutral actor, particularly by the belligerent organisations. This affirmative perception of the EU is probably due to its different modality in peacemaking that relies on the

⁴ Interview with the Programme Manager of the EU Project in the Bangsamoro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Makati City, 11 August 2016.

use of normative power, unlike its American and Australian counterparts that have clear military agendas in the southern Philippines.⁵ It also established partnership for development cooperation with the MILF by inviting some of its key leaders to have audience and dialogue with the EU ministers in Brussels in May 2016.⁶

The Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 sets out the liberalist identity of the EU as a supranational organisation that engages in international affairs on the global stage. The Treaty embodies the liberal principles of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and observance of international law, which guide and govern the conduct of the Union's external actions. The Treaty also emphasises that the EU should operate within the framework of the UN, which is the most influential liberal institution in the world (Espesor 2017b; Philpott 2012). The presence and engagement of the EU in the peace operations in the southern Philippines is warranted by the said Treaty, giving the Union the mandate to "assist populations, countries and regions confronting natural and man-made disasters," such as Mindanao (Treaty of Lisbon 2007 Article 10A (g)).

Since 2009, the EU has become a major development and peacebuilding actor, but with no ground presence in Mindanao. As Manfredini puts it, 'we don't act directly: our supports are mediated'⁷. He refers to the strategy of the EU Delegation to the Philippines for commissioning third party institutions that can deliver the EU agenda for peace and development in the southern Philippines. The EU has established institutional partnerships with local and national agencies of the Philippine government, international organisations that are operating in Mindanao, and homegrown and international NGOs to support the peace process. This multi-sectoral partnership approach of the EU in Mindanao is based on its Global Strategy that gives primary significance to partnering with state agencies and private and civil society organisations around the world. The Union values the importance of people outside the official sphere of the state to realise its goal to bring about peace and progress beyond Europe. Moreover, the 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) declares that "the EU will invest in pivotal non-state actors. We will sharpen the means to protect and empower civic actors, notably human rights defenders, sustaining a vibrant civil society worldwide" (European Union 2016b, 43).

The Global Strategy provides justification for the Union's preference to commission European NGOs to execute most of its peacebuilding functions in Mindanao. Local and international NGOs

⁵ Interview with the Country Representative of The Asia Foundation, Pasig City, 11 August 2016.

⁶ Interview with the Philippine Programme Manager of the Henry Dunant Centre, Ortigas City, 9 August 2016.

⁷ Interview, Makati City, 12 August 2016.

in the southern Philippines are the primary liberal peace agents contracted by the EU to deliver a wide range of liberal peace-inspired services and activities in the conflict zone. The EU prefers to hire the services of INGOs that are mostly based in Europe, to deliver its peacebuilding commitments in Mindanao. This affirmative attitude and high level of trust of the EU towards NGOs has already been given, as the latter were heavily involved in the writing of the 2016 EUGS. According to Nathalie Tocci, the Special Advisor to Federica Mogherini, EU's High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, think-tank institutions and NGOs, especially those with a focus on human rights, have been widely consulted and have participated in the formulation of the EUGS that has guided the Union's external action services after Brexit (Tocci 2016, 465). This harmonious relationship of the EU and NGOs in Europe is also demonstrated in Mindanao. NGOs have become the favourite actors of the EU when it comes to the execution of its peacebuilding agenda in the southern Philippines. They are the ultimate liberal peace agents working on behalf of the Union to promote peace through the diffusion of transnational ideas and norms, particularly democracy and human rights. Aside from NGOs, the EU also taps several other agents that include UN agencies, media and agencies of the Philippine government, as well as illiberal agents like rebel groups and warlords.

6.2 | NGOs as entrepreneurs of norms

NGOs are part of the transnational civil society, and are active agents in norm diffusion, particularly in the areas of human rights and human security (Acharya 2012). In Mindanao, it is clear that the NGOs, especially those from Europe, have earned the favour of the EU in performing its peacebuilding functions and diffusing democratic ideas and practices in the conflict zone. In the process of norm diffusion, NGOs are strategic agents for the EU to transport norms from Europe to the conflict-affected communities of Mindanao. The referents of these norms are in the EU's *acquis communautaire*⁸, which transcends Westphalian notions of peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, development and human rights⁹ (Manners 2002; Whitman 2011).

There are various reasons why the EU mobilises NGOs in demonstrating its normative or civilian power, particularly in diffusing transnational ideas and norms in conflict-riven communities. Firstly, these NGOs have extensive experience in peacebuilding, and sound track records in global conflict mediation and resolution. Extensive experience and institutional credentials in peace

⁸ For a comprehensive explanation of the EU's *acquis communautaire*, see Miller (2011).

⁹ These norms are explicitly mentioned in Article two of the Lisbon Treaty and Article six of the Treaty of the European Union.

operations are important for NGOs to convince donors to grant financial support for their proposed activities or award projects to them that are within the priority areas of funding agencies. It is critically important for NGOs to demonstrate expertise and profound knowledge in conflict resolution and transformation, as well as in the promotion of transitional justice, particularly truth and reconciliation.¹⁰

Secondly, European NGOs are the same partners of the EU in its peacebuilding interventions in other countries. It is observed that the EU commissions almost the same NGOs in the delivery of its peacebuilding functions in different countries. For example, the EU funded the Swiss NGO, HD Centre, to broker the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement from 2000 to 2003 in Aceh, Indonesia (see HD Centre 2002). The HD Centre is a major peacebuilding partner of the EU in the southern Philippines, particularly in conducting community-level dialogues.¹¹

Thirdly, European NGOs are based on the values and principles that are aligned to the liberal values of the EU, particularly the universal moral principle of human rights and fundamental freedoms and strict observance of the international law. These NGOs are fully aware of the policies and strategies used by the EU in financing development and humanitarian efforts around the globe. The 2016 EUGS, for instance, was a product of collaboration and consultations with various European INGOs, civil society and research institutions in Europe (Tocci 2016). Hence, it is apt to claim that the voices and agenda of civil society groups in Europe are included and embedded in the said legal instrument that guides the Union in the conduct of its external affairs.

Fourthly, these INGOs based in Europe have strong connections with the members of the EU Parliament. Most of these INGOs, if not all, are operated and governed by highly influential people who have political linkages with the EU ministers in Brussels. For example, in July 2016 the HD Centre announced the appointment of the former Head of the EU's External Action Services, Ambassador Pierre Vimont, as the chair of its foundation board (HD Centre 2016). The INGOs are also well connected to the government officials of different European states, including non-EU members. For instance, the HD Centre not only supports the EU mission in Mindanao: it is also the service provider of the Royal Norwegian Government that facilitates the peace talks

¹⁰ Interview with the Chairman of the NGO coalition in Mindanao, Davao City, 18 January 2018.

¹¹ Interview with the Philippine Programme Manager of the Henry Dunant Centre, Ortigas City, 9 August 2016.

between the GRP and the communist National Democratic Front. Both the EU and Norway provide financial grants to the HD Centre in the Philippines (see HD Centre, n.d.).

Fifthly, sub-contracting to European NGOs is a strategic mechanism to plough the money back into Europe. Most of these INGOs in the Philippines are operated by European civil society workers and they mostly hire highly paid consultants and expatriates from different European countries.¹² As seen in the design of the Democratic Party Development in the Bangsamoro, the KAS commissions the services of academics from different universities in Europe to provide input as resource persons to the local participants in the programme.¹³

Sixthly, employing European NGOs is a tool to manufacture consent and legitimacy for the EU in its involvement in Mindanao. NGOs typically claim that they are the ultimate representatives of the war-afflicted masses and they are closer to the people at the grassroots. They also claim efficiency and responsiveness in providing service to ordinary members of the community, particularly in complex emergencies, over official agencies of the state. Hence, the EU's approach of allowing NGOs to perform its peacebuilding and development functions is tactical in increasing its legitimacy and reinforcing its global image as a supranational institution and normative power that provides humanitarian support in distant regions of the world.

Seventhly, in contested political environments, NGOs are strategic agents that can be mobilised by the EU to deal and negotiate with coercive and hostile actors. In Mindanao, IAG, KAS and HD Centre are EU-funded NGOs that have extensive networks and connections with rebel leaders and local strongmen in the Bangsamoro. These NGOs facilitate access for the EU to involve warlord politicians and insurgents in its democratisation initiatives in the Bangsamoro.¹⁴

Finally, supporting NGOs justifies the EU's foreign policy or the conduct of its actions outside Europe. The provision of development aid and assistance to European NGOs is beneficial for their continued survival as social organisations that are sustained through donor money. The grants from the EU not only allow these INGOs to finance their operations, but also, more importantly, they ensure organisational survival. Foreign aid is necessary to generate and provide employment

¹² Personal communication with a project officer of the UNDP in the Philippines, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

¹³ Interview with the Programme Manager of the EU Project in the Bangsamoro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Makati City, Philippines, 11 August 2016.

¹⁴ Interview with the Philippine Programme Manager of the Henry Dunant Centre, Ortigas City, 9 August 2016.

for people working in various European NGOs. This is the reason why EU member states prefer their own NGOs to deliver their peace and development commitments in Mindanao according to their bilateral relationships with the Philippines. Moreover, supporting European NGOs financially is a strategic mechanism through which Brussels can justify the Union's external actions to the taxpayers of Europe.

Large and influential European NGOs have the comparative advantage over other local NGOs in the Philippines in accessing financial grants from the EU.¹⁵ These INGOs are the biggest private service providers of the Union in the implementation of its peacebuilding interventions in the southern Philippines. Table seven shows the list of major INGOs that lay the groundwork in the conflict zone on behalf of the Union.

Table 7. List of Major EU-funded NGOs

Name of NGO	Country	Expertise
Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue	Switzerland	Mediation and local dialogue
Conciliation Resources	United Kingdom	Promotion of grassroots public participation and governance
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung	Germany	Development of political party and civil society organizations
<i>Fondation Suisse de Déminage</i>	Switzerland	Destruction of landmines and unexploded ordinance, and community-based education on eliminating landmines
Nonviolent Peaceforce	France and USA	Civilian protection and promotion of human rights
Source: European Union Delegation to the Philippines 2016		

Although the key peacebuilding interventions of the EU in Mindanao are mostly implemented by European NGOs, Philippine-based NGOs are also commissioned by the Union. CFSI and

¹⁵ Interview with the Chairman of the NGO coalition in Mindanao, Davao City, 18 January 2018.

MinLand are the only two recipient NGOs of the multi-million dollar Mindanao Trust Fund (MTF), to which the EU and Sweden are the biggest contributors. The World Bank, which manages the MTF, appointed these INGOs and is not directly contracted by the EU. The Union also supports local NGOs, such as the Mindanao Peoples' Caucus and Moslem Organisation of Government Officials and Professionals, in their participation in the International Monitoring Team. These local NGOs, particularly those that are homegrown and have grassroots engagements, can share local knowledge with the members of the EU Delegation, so that they can have in-depth understanding of the situation in the southern Philippines (MacDonald and Viñals 2012).

As I have already explained the value of NGOs as liberal agents of the EU, in the next section I will analyse the process whereby NGOs localise transnational norms in Mindanao.

6.3 | Localisation of transnational norms in the Bangsamoro

In dealing with the issue of insurgency in Mindanao, the Philippine government has been constantly open and willing to accommodate the participation of external actors, especially NGOs and IGOs, in a multi-track peace operation. This receptive attitude of the Philippine government towards external peacebuilding players constitutes an opportunity for them to facilitate democratisation through the localisation of transnational norms and ideas. The democratic regime in the Philippines provides a conducive space for NGOs and IGOs, acting as norm entrepreneurs, to promote liberal values and ideas that are deemed necessary to attain long-term peace in Mindanao. Finnemore (1993, 565) asserts that international organisations are the “teachers of norms.” In her case study on UNESCO, she claims that this particular international organisation is prescribing and teaching states the value and importance of science policy. In the same vein, the EU is also acting as a major promoter of transnational norms in the international system, especially peace and human rights. The promotion of peace is at the centre of the EU's foreign policy, as it is historically regarded as a “peace project” (Dudouet and Dressler 2016, 6). Given its aggressive campaign for the abolition of the death penalty globally, the EU is seen as a moral entrepreneur that promotes the universality of human rights (Manners 2002). In Mindanao, NGOs are the primary agents mobilised by the EU in reconstructing and modifying norms that would suit the existing realities and prevailing local cultures in the conflict zone.

The current situation in the southern Philippines is timely for the EU, as an international norm entrepreneur, to export normative values of democracy, peace, human rights and development. According to Acharya (2004, 246-247), there are social forces that shape the localisation of transnational norms and ideas. Firstly, security or economic crises encourage local actors to borrow foreign norms by questioning the value and legitimacy of the existing rules of the game. Secondly, domestic actors seek to import foreign norms, particularly respect for human rights, which would legitimise their rule and identity. Thirdly, a shift in the power structure or interests of great powers may lead to norm diffusion. The first two of these conditions are present in Mindanao. The apparent weakness of the Philippines state to manage armed conflict and respond to the needs of the civilians provides a justifiable entry point for external actors, such as the EU and its partner NGOs, to engage in peacebuilding and introduce liberal norms in Mindanao. For example, normative ideas of participatory democracy and development are becoming popular among certain groups due to extreme poverty in conflict-affected communities. Abject poverty is blamed for the corruption and failure in governance of the warlord political leaders who have dominated Mindanao's political landscape for decades.¹⁶ The disenchantment of conflict-stricken population motivates rebel leaders to enter into politics and vie for political power against traditional political rulers. The anticipated reconfiguration of the power structure in the southern Philippines, as a result of the 2014 CAB and 2016 BOL, will allow MILF members to offer an alternative political leadership to warlord-style politics. Moreover, the MILF and indigenous grassroots organisations are receptive to the democracy promotion schemes of the EU in Mindanao. The inclination of these indigenous actors in the conflict zone to receive democratic norms, which the EU is promoting, is crucial for them to gain the attention and support of the international community and achieve legitimacy as emerging political rulers in the southern Philippines.

To better understand the dynamic process of norm transfer from Europe to the conflict zone of Mindanao, I shall borrow Amitav Acharya's conceptual model on norm localisation. According to this model, localisation refers to the process of transmitting ideas where actors "borrowed foreign ideas about authority and legitimacy and fitted them into indigenous traditions and practices" (2004, 244). There are four stages involved in the localisation of transnational norms. These are "prelocalisation, local initiative, adaptation, and amplification and universalisation" (Acharya 2004, 251). This model is used to explain the process of norm diffusion by the EU as it is the most

¹⁶ Interview with the First Vice Chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Chairman of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, Pigkalagan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, 22 July 2016.

influential external player that is employing a normative power in promoting peace and consolidating democracy in war-torn Mindanao.

Prelocalisation is a stage of resistance and contestation, in which local actors cast doubts on and express fears towards external norms, as these might be detrimental to their current beliefs and practices. Local actors are likely to initiate localisation if they are able to perceive that foreign norms are legitimate, because they can enhance their legitimacy and the value of existing institutions (Acharya 2004). The people in the southern Philippines, especially the Muslims, have historical resentment towards the Europeans and Americans. This resentment is rooted in the colonial legacy of Spain in the country. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish sent military troops from Manila to conquer the Moro people and convert them to Christianity (Boquet 2017).

Islamic beliefs are deeply embedded in the consciousness of Muslim people and they were a significant part of their collective identity, even before the arrival of the Spanish in the Philippines. Out of fear of proselytisation or conversion into Christianity, Moro warriors confronted the Spanish with fierce resistance. They continued to resist colonial rule even after the Spanish ceded the Philippines to America through the Treaty of Paris in 1898 (Boquet 2017). Such historical animosity constitutes a huge challenge for external norm entrepreneurs, like NGOs, in their effort to introduce liberal normative values and ideas in present-day Mindanao. People in the conflict zone remain suspicious of the presence of foreign actors in Mindanao.¹⁷ Hence, it is strategic for the EU to mobilise NGOs that can facilitate the process of prelocalisation of transnational norms in the southern Philippines. The fact that the MILF is demonstrating an inclination towards external normative values, especially peace, parliamentary democracy and development, is a major indicator that the EU's effort to diffuse liberal norms is gaining traction in Mindanao. The EU appears to be the most appealing external player from the standpoint of the MILF as it has no military power in the Philippines. It is also the biggest source of foreign aid, which finances development projects in various MILF communities throughout Mindanao. Hence, its perceived generosity and peaceful image are beneficial for the EU to seek to persuade the MILF to become a recipient of transnational norms.¹⁸

Prelocalisation of liberal norms is gaining momentum because the MILF is aiming to transform itself from a revolutionary organisation to a political party as a mechanism to acquire political

¹⁷ Confidential interview, General Santos City, 22 January 2018.

¹⁸ Interview with a senior MILF official and member of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

authority and earn legitimacy in post-BOL Mindanao. In the past, Muslim people residing in MILF-controlled territories did not participate in Philippine elections, as they did not recognise the sovereignty of the Philippine government in Mindanao. However, on 8 March 2015, thousands of civilians, including base and field commanders of the MILF registered for the first time with the Commission on Elections (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2015, 8 March). Controversially, MILF sympathisers are merely following orders from their leaders, and are therefore compelled to register to vote in elections.¹⁹ Nonetheless, it is apparent that the MILF is beginning to recognise the value of electoral democracy, although a foreign idea, as a new pathway to legitimisation. The prelocalisation of participatory democracy, as a normative value, is a useful tactic for the MILF to enhance its profile and prestige as an emerging political organisation in the southern Philippines.

Aside from the MILF, grassroots organisations led by women leaders from different Muslim and IP communities are also currently demonstrating interest in borrowing external norms, which can facilitate their inclusion in governance in the Bangsamoro. Women in conflict-affected communities are largely a marginalised and powerless group. Their inclination to receive foreign normative values, especially peace, participatory democracy and good governance, is perceived to be advantageous in advancing participation in political affairs and electoral exercise in the Bangsamoro. The acceptance of foreign norms provides these women with a route to political empowerment. It is also favourable for them in attracting the attention and gain support from international norm brokers, particularly the EU. For instance, the Teduray Lambangian Women's Organisation from Upi, Maguindanao, is a long-time partner of EU-funded NGOs in Mindanao.²⁰ This grassroots organisation of IP women is a key partner of the EU in the localisation of transnational norms in the southern Philippines. NGOs mobilised by the EU in Mindanao, such as the KAS, IAG²¹ and Conciliation Resources are instrumental in empowering IP and Muslim women through capacity building in governance and political leadership (Mendoza 2014). Therefore, the motivation of local actors, especially the MILF and grassroots women's organisations, towards receiving and borrowing foreign normative values and ideas, may be due to the influence of NGOs, which are the EU's primary norm diffusion agents.

¹⁹ Confidential interview, General Santos City, 30 July 2016.

²⁰ Interview with a manager of the EU Project in the Bangsamoro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Makati City, Philippines, 11 August 2016.

²¹ Personal communication with a conflict resolution expert from the Institute for Autonomy and Governance, General Santos City, 12 January 2017.

Local initiative is about entrepreneurship and framing of external norms by local actors to make it appealing to the local audience. Those who accept such norms should be given credibility and should not be perceived as outsiders, so that norm diffusion can continue to grow in a target community (Acharya 2004, 251). For this reason, it is important for NGOs to persuade and mobilise influential actors in Mindanao in framing normative ideas of peace, democracy and human rights. The mobilisation of these local actors is strategic in creating an impression among a local population that these foreign ideas are not harmful to their local beliefs and practices. These local actors include high-ranking MILF commanders, community tribal leaders, and local academics, as well as local NGO workers, who are highly respected by ordinary civilians in the conflict zone.

In MILF-controlled communities, it is considerably advantageous for the EU to diffuse liberal democratic norms under the support of high-ranking rebel officials to EU's peacebuilding interventions in Mindanao, particularly political party development and socio-economic development projects in different MILF Base Camps. Civilian supporters of the MILF are likely to embrace and accept foreign norms that are transmitted by their leaders from Camp Darapanan and communicated at the village level through local rebel commanders. In non-Islamised indigenous communities, tribal leaders are the best-suited actors to be mobilised towards introducing foreign norms, as they are well respected by the members of the community. It is important for norm entrepreneurs, like NGOs, to coordinate and engage these traditional village chiefs in socialising the IPs about liberal democratic norms. Tribal leaders are also helpful in explaining and introducing foreign concepts, such as peace, human rights and governance, in local languages and dialects in their respective communities. Extreme poverty thrives in IP communities. The IPs are also frequent victims of marginalisation and human rights violations, perpetuated by the military, insurgent groups (Cariño 2012) and warlord politicians.²² Hence, normative values of development and human rights are morally appealing to the indigenous population, especially the Manobo and Teduray, who are living in the conflict zone. Moreover, the NGOs implementing EU peacebuilding projects are hiring prominent intellectuals from local universities to help them in localising foreign norms. These local academics are not only socially influential, they are also able to convey foreign concepts in local languages and are highly aware of the contexts and realities of such concepts in Mindanao. For instance, in the implementation of the EU's project on democratic party development in the Bangsamoro, representatives of the MILF prefer to have local experts and academics as resource persons, rather than international

²² Interview with a tribal chieftain of the Arumanen-Manobo tribe, Davao City, 24 April 2016.

speakers. For them, some of the insights and concepts shared by foreign intellectuals are too western and as such are not relevant in the context of Mindanao.²³

Subsequent to the framing of foreign normative values and ideas by local actors, external norms have to be reconstructed and adjusted to fit existing beliefs and traditions. This stage is called adaptation, which involves the grafting and pruning of external norms to make them congruent with pre-established normative structures in a target community (Acharya 2004). The interface between transnational liberal norms and local capacities for peace is a phenomenon labelled as hybridity in the scholarship of Mac Ginty (2010; 2014) and Richmond (2011).

In Mindanao, NGOs, acting as liberal agents of the EU, are necessary norm entrepreneurs because they are equipped with knowledge from the conflict zone. Their experiential knowledge is helpful in finding a common ground that harmonises external structures with pre-existing normative structures and values in conflict-affected communities in Mindanao. For example, peace as a normative value is not difficult to introduce and promote to the Muslim people, who comprised 90.5% of the entire ARMM population (Boquet 2017, 662). Norm entrepreneurs find Islam to be the common ground in introducing the foreign concept of peace to the various Moro communities in Mindanao. Peace is a normative value that is deeply ingrained in Islamic teaching that “Islam is a religion of peace and the complete submission to the will of Allah” (Al Qalam Institute 2018). NGOs and their local partners often convey the concept of peace as *salaam*, which is the Arabic word for it. They also use Islamic values, particularly *musyawarah* (deliberation) and *mufakat* (consensus), to establish congruence between liberal and local epistemologies of peace.²⁴ The MILF is a conservative religious insurgent organisation. Its followers and supporters are likely to embrace external values, particularly peace and reconciliation, which are compatible with their Islamic faith and endorsed by their leaders.²⁵ It is likely that these foreign ideas are already filtered and sanitised by top-ranking officials of the MILF when these external norms are communicated at the village level.²⁶

The last stage in the localisation process is the “amplification and universalisation” of external norms. The interaction and convergence of foreign and local normative structures and values have

²³ Interview with a project officer of the Bangsamoro Development Authority, General Santos City, 27 July 2016.

²⁴ Interview with a senior professor and anthropologist in the Mindanao State University, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

²⁵ Interview with a senior MILF official and member of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

²⁶ Confidential interview.

produced syncretic outcomes in a form of “new instruments and practices” that highlight the visibility and value of local agency (Acharya 2004, 251). The EU devotes considerable attention to the amplification of the normative value of human rights in conflict-ridden communities. It is interested in financially supporting rights-based NGOs that are performing this perilous task of monitoring human rights violations and promoting respect for human rights in Mindanao.²⁷ At present, the EU is financially supporting the ARMM Regional Human Rights Commission through the UNDP. It is funding the creation of three human rights monitoring centres in the island Provinces of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-tawi (European Union-UNDP 2014). It has also pledged more than EUR 5 million to establish the Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission (BHRC) once an organic law is passed by the Philippine Congress to enforce the 2014 peace agreement (Marcelo 2014). The establishment of the BHRC is crucial for the EU in amplifying liberal norms by building a democratic institution, whose specific function is to promote human rights and address the issue of human rights deficit in this war-torn region of the Philippines, as previously discussed in Chapter Five. Building democratic institutions is a long-term investment for democratisation and necessary for the continued diffusion and universalisation of liberal norms, among generations of people in Mindanao.

Democratic institutions are the best repository and knowledge hub of external norms, particularly human rights and rule of law, which are localised by influential norm actors involved in norm diffusion. Moreover, the EU and its partner NGOs are careful not to deal with sensitive aspects of the local cultures and beliefs in Mindanao that might incite resistance to foreign ideas. For instance, the MILF is aiming to establish a *shariah* regime in post-BOL Mindanao. *Shariah* or Islamic law is part of the identity of Muslim people in the southern Philippines.²⁸ Some of its tenets have been observed to be incompatible with the universal principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as evidenced by the harsh implementation of the *shariah* in present-day Aceh, Indonesia²⁹ (Espesor 2019). Therefore, in Mindanao, norm entrepreneurs focus on diffusing liberal norms that might resonate and appeal to various influential actors on the ground. After all, public perception of local ownership should be ensured to legitimise externally sponsored peacebuilding operations (Newman 2011). This does not mean that the EU-funded NGOs are ignoring local practices and beliefs that do not cohere with cosmopolitan norms. It is simply a tactical mechanism to prevent the emergence of any major resistance or objection from powerful groups against liberal democratic ideas.

²⁷ Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to the Philippines, Makati City, 12 August 2016.

²⁸ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

²⁹ Interview with a researcher and journalist of the Human Rights Watch, Jakarta, Indonesia, 17 May 2016.

6.4 | Target groups in norm diffusion

The EU and its partner NGOs focus on targeting specific groups in the Bangsamoro as receivers of liberal-democratic norms. These groups include the MILF, MNLF, local politicians, women leaders, tribal chieftains, and youth leaders. They are particularly targeted for norm diffusion owing to their strategic role in shaping the institutions and priorities in the forthcoming Bangsamoro Government (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung n.d). Nonetheless, the level and magnitude of efforts and resources allotted for norm diffusion vary in each group. At present, the EU-funded NGOs have devoted more attention to the MILF as possible takers of liberal-democratic norms. They give priority to the MILF as a target of norm diffusion due to its desire to negotiate peacefully with the Philippine government.³⁰ Moreover, this armed group is influential among Muslim people residing in different MILF-controlled communities (see Figure 8) who are the ultimate target of democratic norms.³¹ The women and youth leaders are also targeted by NGOs as possible champions of liberal values and ideas.³² Local politicians and the MNLF are indirect targets of norm diffusion owing to the political complexities in the southern Philippines. The EU and its NGO partners are having difficulty in establishing lines of communication to include the local strongmen and MNLF leaders in their democracy promotion interventions.³³

It is strategic for the EU through its partner NGOs to pay significant attention to the MILF as the primary taker of liberal-democratic norms. This armed group is the most powerful insurgent organisation and has thousands of combatants and civilian supporters in the southern Philippines. Before the enactment of the Basic Law, the MILF had initiated its transformation from a revolutionary group to a political organisation, the United Bangsamoro Justice Party. Facilitating this transformation of the MILF from being a coercive actor to a democratic peace agent is also beneficial for the EU in reinforcing its legitimacy in international peacebuilding and global prestige. The expected accession to politics of the MILF is a necessary condition for a successful transplantation of liberal democratic value and ideas in post-BOL Mindanao. MILF leaders have shown a high level of reception to the democratic norms and ideas being promoted by the EU in Mindanao. For them, the EU is perceived as sincere with its agenda to facilitate democratic

³⁰ Interview with a member of the EU Delegation to the Philippines, Makati City, 12 August 2016.

³¹ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

³² Interview with an academic in the Ateneo De Davao University, Davao City, 19 January 2018.

³³ Personal communication with a conflict resolution expert from the Institute for Autonomy and Governance, General Santos City, 12 January 2017.

transition and consolidation in Mindanao.³⁴ It is also possible that the MILF leaders act that way to gain financial incentives from the EU. Although the EU has no ground presence, Ambassador Franz Jessen together with ambassadors of EU member states visited Camp Darapanan in October 2017 to strengthen the Union's partnership with the MILF (see Deeya 2017, 4 October).

Leaders of the MILF have been introduced to various democratic polities, including the EU Parliament in Brussels, to demonstrate the peace-promoting features of the liberal peace politically and physically in Europe. Educational trips for rebel leaders to Europe were facilitated by IAG, KAS and HD Centre.³⁵ According to a senior MILF leader,

it is relatively easy for the MILF in coming to terms with the EU as it has no military interest in Mindanao. The Europeans are not arrogant and [they are] more focused in diffusing liberal-democratic norms – unlike the Chinese and the Americans that are actively engaged in the provision of military aid in the Philippines. Ideas can be distorted and modified. Ideas do not kill. It is the bombs and guns that kill the Moro people.³⁶

This statement is a compelling indicator that the MILF is responding positively to the efforts of the EU to transport liberal values and ideas in the Bangsamoro. Foreign norms from Europe are not perceived as incompatible or detrimental to local Islamic values and principles that are deeply cherished by the MILF. Islam is a religion of peace, and therefore it does not come into tension with the liberal peacebuilding of the EU and its partner NGOs. In addition, the MILF is not threatened by embracing democratic norms as they have a tendency towards pragmatism. Minor deviation and slight modification of liberal values and ideas is an available option for the MILF to accommodate local contexts and ground realities in the conflict zone.³⁷ Therefore, there is an obvious *quid pro quo* relationship between the EU and the MILF. On the one hand, the EU is able to demonstrate its normative power as a “force for good” (Diez and Pace 2011, 211) despite precarious security in Mindanao. On the other hand, this friendly relationship with the EU helps the MILF in legitimating its cause in the international scene and attracting the attention of the global community to the unfolding peace process in the southern Philippines.

³⁴ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

³⁵ Interview with the Philippines Programme Manager of the Henry Dunant Centre, Ortigas City, 9 August 2016.

³⁶ Interview, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

³⁷ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

The women in the Bangsamoro are another target group of norm diffusion. The EU and its partner NGOs focus on building the capacity of women leaders from different Muslim and IP communities for democratic governance and citizenship. Women who are affiliated with the MILF and IP community-based organisations are given primary consideration in EU funded programmes of NGOs on developing political parties and civil society in the Bangsamoro. The inclusion of women in the political process is necessary to promote inclusivity and gender-sensitive conflict transformation mechanisms in the southern Philippines.³⁸ As noted in the power map in Chapter Four, women are among the marginalised and powerless groups. Hence, the participation and exposure of women to democracy promotion initiatives by NGOs is strategic in making them promoters of liberal-democratic norms in their respective communities. NGOs have created platforms for the inclusion and involvement of women despite the patriarchal nature of the Bangsamoro society. Facilitating women's participation in the peace process not only legitimises the actions and efforts of the EU in Mindanao. It also constitutes political incentives for women to engage actively in politics and governance, to ensure that their legitimate grievances are heard and taken into consideration.

Although the Bangsamoro is a male-centric society, the women are strategic local champions who can be best mobilised for the diffusion of democratic norms at the community level. It is possible that these women participating in EU projects are not totally aware that they are being schooled with liberal ideas and are subjects of norm diffusion. Mothers could unwittingly persuade their children at home to believe in the normative utility of the liberal peace. Some of them are likely to influence their neighbours and relatives of the ideational value of democratic ideas and principles in their respective villages.³⁹ These women are key agents in diffusing liberal norms. They have the capability of bringing reforms in their community and penetrating formal spaces, like local peace and order councils, to express real issues confronting them in the war zone.⁴⁰

Finally, the youth are the current target of the EU and NGOs for norm diffusion. It is strategically necessary to target the youth as receivers and takers of liberal-democratic norms to facilitate long-term democratic consolidation in the Bangsamoro. It has been observed that across political and ethnic lines the young are the most receptive to democratic norm diffusion. They possess the vigour and enthusiasm to engage in a wide range of peacebuilding activities spearheaded by various

³⁸ Interview with a manager of an EU Project in the Bangsamoro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Makati City, 11 August 2016.

³⁹ Interview with the Chairman of the NGO coalition in Mindanao, Davao City, 18 January 2018.

⁴⁰ Interview with a programme officer of UN Women in the Philippines, Davao City, 23 April 2016.

NGOs in Mindanao. Young people from different ethnic groups, including sons and daughters of warlord politicians and rebel commanders have the desire to participate in workshops, training and conferences sponsored by the EU. For instance, more than 200 young people from different parts of Mindanao participated in the Muslim Young Leaders Congress in General Santos City in January 2018. The Congress was organised by a local Muslim NGO with funding support from the UNDP and the EU.⁴¹ Some of the youth are perhaps unconscious that they are the direct target of liberal norm diffusion. Nonetheless, these NGO activities are a constitutive avenue for socialisation of the Moro youth to liberal ideas.⁴² Smart and subtle ways of localising foreign ideas are important to lessen resistance and opposition from subjects of norm diffusion. Moreover, finding champions among the youth is important for the sustainability of liberal peacebuilding in Mindanao. The next generation of Moro leaders are beneficiaries of the political incentives and material rewards as a natural consequence of the peace process. They will also inherit the problems and dilemmas that are inherent in communities that are transitioning to democracy from violent armed conflict. Lastly, norm diffusion is focused on the youth as a major mechanism to securitise liberal peacebuilding. They have become the favourite target of radicalised and extremist groups that are propagating a militant version of Islam in the southern Philippines. The non-passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law during the presidency of Benigno Aquino Jr. has caused enormous disappointment and frustration among the Moro youth, which has made them more likely to resort to violent extremism. For this reason, the EU and its partner NGOs endeavour to engage the youth in political dialogue as a counter mechanism to radicalisation and extremism.⁴³

6.5 | Reaction of local strongmen and radicals to norm diffusion

The political investments for democracy promotion through norm diffusion by the EU and NGOs are generating some tensions and dilemmas on the ground. Local strongmen with multiple sources of power see the peace process as unilaterally beneficial to the MILF. The EU funded a number of NGOs to implement development projects in various MILF camps throughout Mindanao in collaboration with the BDA.⁴⁴ It is also investing in building the capacity of the UBJP for political affairs and governance in the Bangsamoro through training on political party and civil society

⁴¹ I was personally invited to give a keynote lecture at this Congress.

⁴² Personal communication with a project officer of the UNDP in the Philippines, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

⁴³ Interview with a manager of the EU Project in the Bangsamoro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Makati City, 11 August 2016.

⁴⁴ Interview with a project officer of the Bangsamoro Development Authority, General Santos City, 27 July 2016.

development and educational tours to Europe and post-conflict societies in Asia.⁴⁵ This preferential treatment of the EU towards the MILF is causing provocation and antagonism on the part of local rulers, particularly warlord politicians. In fact, some of them have blatantly expressed warnings of spoiling the peace process. They are inclined to employ violence if their authority is undermined and their interests are continually subordinated, and they possess private armies and many firearms.⁴⁶

The process of norm diffusion that is heavily focused on the MILF is threatening to the power and status of local strongmen. The transformation of the MILF into a political organisation and the expected entry of its leaders into politics will likely reconfigure the political landscape in the southern Philippines. Some local rulers who have the current monopoly of power might be dislodged from their posts or might be forced to accept a compromise to share power with other groups in the Bangsamoro. Because the Philippine Congress enacted the BOL, many groups, including Muslim NGOs and various community-based organisations will join the political bandwagon led by the MILF in vying for power against Bangsamoro's local strongmen.⁴⁷ The leadership of the MILF has expressed confidence that they are ready to compete for political power in a democratic election with local rulers. They have expressed optimism that the Moro people will support them in the election as long as the playing fields are even. This means that it is vital for the Philippine government and the international community to ensure a fair and open election. The immediate dismantling of informal militias is an imperative to achieve genuine and meaningful democratic election in the Bangsamoro.⁴⁸

The leaders of the MILF are aware of the reaction of warlord politicians towards the overwhelming support of the international community, particularly that of the EU, which seeks to transform the MILF into a democratic organisation. A senior MILF official puts it:

if the warlords feel that they are losing the game; they will surely compromise. The Central Committee of the MILF has been receiving feelers from various warlord clans of their desire to have a dialogue with us. These 'writings on the wall' are of

⁴⁵ Interview with a manager of the EU Project in the Bangsamoro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Makati City, 11 August 2016.

⁴⁶ Confidential interview with an anonymous political anthropologist and NGO official, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

⁴⁷ Interview with a senior programme officer of the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

⁴⁸ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, 21 January 2018, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

course through our *ulama* and not directly [to] the leaders of the MILF in Daparanan.⁴⁹

He added,

we are careful of dealing with the warlords at this time to counter any possibility of co-optation. We, in the MILF, are determined to use the weapon of persuasion according to Quranic provision and *hadith* through the help of our *ulama* in convincing warlords to 'toe [the] line' to bring genuine political reforms in the Bangsamoro.⁵⁰

Such a quote is indicative that the norm diffusion mechanisms of the EU in democratising the MILF and other groups may be gaining traction among local rulers in Mindanao. Investment for democratisation of the MILF is detrimental to the political interests of local strongmen. The EU and their NGOs are helping the armed group to generate consent, legitimacy and political popularity as an apparent contender in a game of power in the Bangsamoro. Moreover, these local rulers are somehow compelled to enter into compromise with the MILF as they are under the watchful eye of the Philippine government under the Duterte Presidency. Some of them are implicated of being involved in the illegal drug business in the Bangsamoro. Consequently, some members of influential warlord clans have personally visited the MILF leaders in Daparanan or through intermediaries to discuss possible alliances.⁵¹

It is a useful tactic for local strongmen to forge alliances and establish networks with emerging political rulers in post-CAB Mindanao for the protection of their interests and to shield them from possible harm. These local rulers are particularly sensitive to norms such as human rights and rule of law, which are priorities of the EU, NGOs and the Swiss Government in Mindanao. Part of the normalisation in the Bangsamoro is the establishment of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission.⁵² The implementation of transitional justice mechanisms there will certainly implicate local strongmen who have perpetuated widespread human rights abuses such as massacres, tortures and land grabbing from powerless Muslims and IPs in the Bangsamoro.⁵³

⁴⁹ Interview, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

⁵⁰ Interview, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

⁵¹ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

⁵² Confidential interview with an anthropology professor in the Mindanao State University and expert on transitional justice, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

⁵³ Confidential interview with an anonymous human rights investigator, Cotabato City, 20 July 2016.

Moreover, the dismantling of private armies during normalisation will certainly and significantly reduce the coercive power of Mindanao's local strongmen.⁵⁴

Another group that is reacting vehemently to liberal norm diffusion is the Islamic conservative MILF commanders. They perceive everything from the west, including democratic norms, values and ideas, as anti-Islamic and therefore evil. They are the rebel leaders who are demonising the liberal peacebuilding interventions of the EU and NGOs in MILF controlled territories.⁵⁵ The MILF leadership has admitted that it is difficult for them to convince their followers, particularly the commanders, to decommission and embrace democratic values. This is particularly true for commanders like Ombra Kato, Bravo and Kadialan who were educated and received military training in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Libya and Egypt. They are more conservative compared to other MILF leaders as they were exposed to Wahhabi-Salafi extremist ideology in the Middle East.⁵⁶ These commanders are now leading the splinter group, BIFM/BIFF. Nonetheless, the Central Committee is confident that these radicalised commanders are willing to go back into the fold of the MILF through the help of the *ulama* or Muslim religious leaders. The *ulama* can likely pacify radicalised rebels and persuade them to give up their arms to pave the way for long lasting peace that has eluded Mindanao for decades.⁵⁷

6.6 | Timeframe for norm diffusion

The diffusion of liberal-democratic norms is crucial in reshaping the complex power structures in the Bangsamoro (see power map in Figure 5). Norm diffusion takes time and it is not a short-term investment to transform a conflictual society with a complex political order into an abode of peace. In Mindanao, NGOs are the primary agents mobilised by the international norm entrepreneurs, particularly the EU, to diffuse democratic norms because they are embedded in local politics and governance. In short, NGOs involved in the peace operations in the Bangsamoro are not mere diffusers of liberal normative ideas and values. They are power brokers who are equipped with the skills that allow them to navigate the precarious terrains of conflict in Mindanao. Moreover, the partner NGOs of the EU are using development projects as an entry point to penetrate intricate socio-political structures in the Bangsamoro. Their goal is to shape and influence the behaviour of

⁵⁴ Interview with an army general and cabinet official, General Santos City, 18 August 2016.

⁵⁵ Confidential interview with an anonymous academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

⁵⁶ Interview with the First Vice Chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Chairman of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, Pigkalagan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, 22 July 2016.

⁵⁷ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

actors and influence them to believe in the ideational utility of liberalism with the aim of transforming intricate power structures in the conflict zone, as illustrated in the power map in Chapter Four.⁵⁸

While norm diffusion is a medium to long term process, and may not see success for a decade or more, the current political environment in the Bangsamoro is favourable for liberal norms to yield success. Firstly, the most influential armed group, the MILF is receptive to the EU's peacebuilding intervention, which is heavily focused on democratic norm diffusion. The MILF is a *de facto* government in Mindanao, which has a huge span of influence on people residing within its strongholds. These MILF supporters may wish to embrace and celebrate hybrid democratic values and ideas due to the persuasive qualities of their leaders in Camp Daparanan. The new generation of MILF leaders are educated and have a strong desire to participate in political contests in post-BOL Mindanao.⁵⁹ Secondly, young people in the Bangsamoro are becoming inclined to engage in political affairs. They are the key targets of liberal NGOs as takers of liberal-local hybrid norms. The German NGOs, KAS and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung for instance, are building the capacity of the youth to become champions of liberal democracy in Mindanao. Most of these young people have acquired a higher education compared to the older generation of leaders, and hence have higher capacity for democratic governance in the Bangsamoro.⁶⁰ Thirdly, the old warlords of Mindanao are on their way out. For example, the most notorious strongman, Andal Ampatuan Sr. of Maguindanao, has already died, and several Moro warlords are quite old already. Ampatuan was an infamous political ruler who did not hesitate to employ violence against his enemies.⁶¹

The new generation of political leaders from warlord clans are demonstrating a new style of leadership in their respective territories.⁶² Although the patriarchs remain influential, some of the new breed of political leaders are gradually shifting away from the traditional style of leadership of their forefathers. In some cases, young politicians have gained persuasive power and significant influence within the clan structure that allow them to execute innovations and governance reforms in their respective bailiwicks. It is observed that sons and daughters of the Ampatuan, Mangudadatu, Sahali, Sinsuat and Mastura families are well-educated and trained in democratic leadership. Some of them have even acquired educational qualifications in the USA and Europe,

⁵⁸ Interview with the Chairman of the NGO coalition in Mindanao, Davao City, 18 January 2018.

⁵⁹ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

⁶⁰ Interview with an academic in the Ateneo De Davao University, Davao City, 19 January 2018.

⁶¹ Interview with a warlord politician in Mindanao, Pasig City, 22 November 2017.

⁶² Personal communication with a Muslim civil society leader in the Bangsamoro, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

which legitimises their stint in politics.⁶³ Hence, it is strategic for the EU to target this new generation of leaders from influential clans to optimise the impact of its democracy promotion project in the Bangsamoro.

Despite optimism that the efforts of norm diffusion will soon yield considerable success in Mindanao, some civil society activists are somewhat sceptical due to the unfriendly attitude of President Duterte towards the EU and other liberal groups. On 19 October 2017, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano announced the formal rejection of all grants from the EU by the Philippine government. The Government is only open to accept EU money as long as there is no conditionality that would compromise Philippine sovereignty. The Duterte presidency is averse to the EU as it criticises the current administration for violating human rights as a consequence of its anti-drug war policy (see Esmaguél 2017a; 2017b). For some civil society activists, the current political regime in the Philippines is not favourable for liberal norms to bring immediate transformation in Mindanao, which is presently under martial law. It is also challenging for civil society groups to find champions inside the cabinet of the Duterte Administration who can be invited for critical engagements in the southern Philippines.⁶⁴

6.7 | Concurrent tendencies to norm diffusion

The diffusion of norms is an ideational phenomenon and its empirical impacts are difficult to identify, particularly in societies that are marred by protracted armed conflicts and with intricate power structures. I argue that there are three concurrent tendencies to the norm diffusion of NGOs in Mindanao: rejection, hybridisation and acceptance. The explanation of these different scenarios is based on the prevailing conditions and existing realities that are documented through extensive fieldwork in Mindanao.

Rejection and failure

The efforts of the EU and its partner NGOs to diffuse norms might lead to a rejection and complete failure, at least of some norms. The existence of a complex power structure in conflict-torn communities in Mindanao generates detrimental socio-political barriers to the diffusion of external norms. The EU is gaining considerable success in mobilising local actors, particularly the MILF rebel leaders, in the localisation of transnational liberal values and ideas in the conflict zone.

⁶³ Confidential interview with an anonymous academic and member of an influential political clan in the Bangsamoro, Davao City, 28 July 2016.

⁶⁴ Interview with the Chairman of the NGO coalition in Mindanao, Davao City, 18 January 2018.

Nonetheless, based on the power map (see Figure 5) it has less influence over powerful and dominant groups in Mindanao. Warlord politicians and kingpins in different localities in the southern Philippines have a strong tendency to demonstrate resistance to liberal norms, which are put forward by the EU and its various liberal peace agents, especially NGOs. Local political bosses are the gatekeepers and brokers of various forms of power in Mindanao. They are in possession of material and political resources, and even equipped with military capabilities, to determine and dictate the rules of the game in their respective domains. They are likely to resist any liberal peacebuilding mechanism employed by external actors that might pose a threat to the existing status quo, hence not favourable to their own interests.⁶⁵

Local strongmen employ patronage and clientelism widely to preserve their continued powerful position in Mindanao. For those who have private armies, threat and intimidation are typical instruments used to ensure ongoing support from powerless members of the community and to eliminate any political opponents. Therefore, local politicians may perceive external norms promoted by the EU, particularly the rule of law, human rights and good governance, as dangerous and detrimental ideas, foreign to their local beliefs and practices. These external values would disturb the existing local order that is maintained through the use of multiple forms of power (a combination of traditional, religious and official political authorities) of warlord politicians. Some influential local actors are sceptical of norm transfer, which is deeper than diffusion. It is perceived as an imposition of hegemonic western ideas and values that might be damaging and harmful to extant beliefs and traditions, especially to the legitimacy of religious and traditional leaders.⁶⁶

Failure of norm transfer due to rejection might be caused by the absence or weakness of traditional democratic institutions in Mindanao. Although in general, the Philippines is a democratic society, war-prone communities in the southern part of the country remain largely traditional and geographically isolated. Muslims and IPs still practise customary forms of leadership, in which traditional rulers are not chosen through democratic elections. It is a difficult task for norm entrepreneurs to introduce foreign concepts, such as democracy, rule of law and other liberal norms to people in Mindanao, especially in the face of elite resistance. In some communities in

⁶⁵ Interview with a Programme Manager of the Institute for Autonomy and Governance, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

⁶⁶ Interview with a *mujahid* of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Pigkalagan, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, 22 July 2016.

the conflict zone, these external concepts are largely meaningless to people who are not familiar with liberal democratic ideas.⁶⁷

Most foreign concepts associated with the liberal peace are not present in the mental schema or frame of reference of many different ethno-linguistic groups, who tend to have their own imagined communities, which are subsumed under the Philippine sovereignty. The term democracy, for instance, has no direct translation in the local languages of the IPs and Muslims in the southern Philippines.⁶⁸ It is hard for ordinary civilians to grasp the meaning and normative value of democracy, including its promise of peace and development. Hence, external norms will likely die if local social forces constantly demonstrate resistance and rejection to it.

Hybridisation

Another tendency of norm diffusion is the emergence of a unique set of hybrid norms in Mindanao. The production of hybrid peacebuilding norms is likely to happen because actors on the ground, particularly NGOs and rebel leaders try to establish congruence between liberal norms and extant beliefs and practices in the conflict zone. The hybridisation of norms at the ideational level may take place through two processes: translation and filtering.

The translation of foreign norms into local languages is one mechanism utilised by NGOs in their attempt to amplify hybrid norms in Mindanao. NGOs are innovative in diffusing liberal democratic norms in the conflict zone. External ideas are framed based on local cultural contexts and expressed in local languages to reach out to a wider audience and to foster ownership of the concepts among people at the community level. They often use local terminologies, such as *kalilintad*, *bitiala* and *pamagayon* in Maguindanaon communities and *kalilintad*/*diakatra*, *sinambong* and *kapamagompiya-i* in Maranao communities respectively, to introduce the concepts of peace, dialogue and reconciliation. The employment of local languages in communicating foreign ideas is a strategic technique used by NGOs in the localisation of transnational norms. According to Hirsh (2015), the use of common terminology is critically important to increase the prospect of success of diffusing norms.

⁶⁷ Interview with a university professor and member of the Independent Decommissioning Body, General Santos City, 7 August 2016.

⁶⁸ Interview with the Director of the Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao - Mindanao State University, 22 August 2016, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

Second, hybridisation of norms is facilitated through filtering of liberal values and practices by key actors on the ground. Local actors who are exposed to liberal normative values may not fully accept and embrace such exogenous epistemology. They are likely to be selective as to which aspects of Western democracy they are willing to adopt and promote in their respective organisations and communities. According to a university professor:

There is no other option left for the MILF, but to transform into a political organisation. Going back to war is no longer an option. The rebel leaders are of old age and the international community is expecting for their immediate transformation because of the signed organic law.⁶⁹

This quote suggests that the rebel group is somewhat forced to build their capacities in civil governance and political affairs and therefore, the assistance of the EU and its partner NGOs is helpful in preparing the MILF to take a new role in the Bangsamoro. Moreover, local MILF commanders expect to be appointed as party chairs of the local chapters of the UBJP. The political party development project of the EU gives these rebel commanders the opportunity to earn political legitimacy and justify their ascent to politics. The participation of rebel commanders in the said project allows them to gain the credentials of being capable of governing the Bangsamoro and not just a revolutionary organisation. And yet, five MILF and UBJP leaders who are recipients of the political party development projects of the KAS and IAG shared during interviews that they do not basically believe or accept the liberal values and practices that have been introduced to them, particularly those from European resource persons. In an interview, the most senior MILF leader, Ghazali Jaafar said:

We appreciate IAG's help very much, but as far as we are concerned, we seek knowledge. We follow this maxim of seeking knowledge from birth to graveyard. Whatever knowledge is offered to us, we welcome that offer. We have our own ideas. We do not accept in toto whatever knowledge is introduced to us.⁷⁰

Jaafar and other MILF leaders agreed that the project is helpful to the UBJP members, but some of the contents are not suited to the local context in Mindanao.⁷¹ Because of the BOL, the MILF is facing a dilemma on how to run an autonomous regional government and not a rebel

⁶⁹ Interview, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

⁷⁰ Interview, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

⁷¹ Confidential interviews with the MILF officials.

organisation. A programme manager from the IAG admits that although their political party development project is overladen with liberal democratic concepts, they are not forcing the participants to fully embrace and absorb such foreign concepts. The IAG and its partner KAS, are offering the MILF an opportunity for them to jumpstart its transformation into a political organisation.⁷²

The involvement of rebel commanders in the democracy promotion projects of NGOs and donors, like political party development, is a strategic site for the hybridisation of norms. Leaders in the MILF Central Committee may apply political and cultural filters to foreign ideas that are introduced to them. Democratic ideas and concepts may trickle down to the community level, but are largely sanitised or filtered by high-ranking MILF leaders.⁷³ Local commanders may apply further filters to these liberal normative values, with radicalised commanders like Ameril Obra and Kadialan likely to reject liberal democratic ideas.⁷⁴ Filtering of foreign ideas is labelled by Acharya (2004, 251) as “pruning” because it allows local actors to select those elements that suit extant beliefs and normative structures and reject ideas and concepts that do not. A *mujahid* turned UBJP leader shared in an interview that “most of the concepts *sa IAG manual di namin ginagamit sa community*” [We do not use most of the concepts provided in the AIG Manual when we are in the community]⁷⁵. He expressed strong resistance to the contents of the manual that is provided to the participants of the local political party development project of IAG and KAS. He also suggested that the manual needs substantial revision that is in accordance with the local contexts. Moreover, such selective attitudes towards liberal democratic norms is also common among Moro youth leaders and women who have been exposed to the democracy promotion projects of the NGOs.⁷⁶ Despite resistance to foreign ideas, the possibility for hybridisation of norms is considerably higher because local actors do not completely reject it, rather they tend to subscribe to some foreign norms that are aligned with their pre-existing normative values, which is helpful in boosting their legitimacy in the Bangsamoro.

Acceptance and success in norm diffusion

Another possible impact of norm diffusion in Mindanao is the acceptance of liberal norms, which may lead to displacement of old and existing power structures and the rise of new political forces.

⁷² Interview. Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

⁷³ Confidential interview, General Santos City, 30 July 2016.

⁷⁴ Confidential interview, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

⁷⁵ Interview, Pigkalagan, Maguindanao, 22 July 2016.

⁷⁶ Interview, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

Norm entrepreneurs may succeed in amplifying liberal norms, especially good governance, electoral democracy and human rights. The amplification of external norms will likely take place if they are able to build and mobilise constituencies from the conflict zone, who have the motivation, capacity, resources and willingness to accept and supplant the old or existing power structures in Mindanao. Should the EU and its partner NGOs be successful in mobilising many local actors in localising transnational norms, particularly at the grassroots, it may weaken the power base of warlord politicians. Ordinary civilians would need to accept that foreign norms are good and appropriate, and they would need eventually to take action to fully displace leaders under the old norms. The elimination of undesirable aspects of political culture, such as patronage and clientelism, requires courage, commitment and public education from the conflict-weary population of Mindanao. These elements of political culture in the conflict zone are key instruments employed by warlord politicians in the preservation of their status and power. Reforming the security sector and strengthening the rule of law in Mindanao are imperatives in affording protection to groups whose agenda is superseding warlord-rule and patron-client politics and institutionalising liberal normative values and ideas. The EU and other members of the donor community are expected to support the Philippine government in the immediate dismantling of various private armies to guarantee the security of different liberal agents, who aim towards norm diffusion.⁷⁷

Being the most receptive group to transnational norms, the MILF is currently indicating it will transform from a revolutionary organisation to a political party. The emergence of the MILF as a new political organisation is strategic for the armed group to vie for power in the election and acquire legitimacy for leadership in the forthcoming Bangsamoro Government. This also means that the MILF leaders and members are going to compete for political power against warlord politicians. If successful, these rebels-turned-politicians will become part of a new circle of political elite in the southern Philippines. They can offer new styles of political leadership as an alternative to the dynastic politics of warlord political clans, who have been in power for decades. However, it is worth noting that the MILF is also patronage-based and has a private military. Moreover, other political forces are likely to emerge from the groups of IPs and women, who are the frequent subjects of subordination and marginalisation in Mindanao. IPs, women and people from powerless groups are likely to secure seats in the envisioned Bangsamoro Parliament, and thereafter participate in political affairs and governance in the southern Philippines.

⁷⁷ Interview with a lawyer and senior MILF official, General Santos City, 21 January 2018.

The efforts of NGOs in framing and grafting external ideas into the local normative structures in Mindanao are important in facilitating success of norm diffusion. However, norm diffusion is not likely to bring about a major and immediate change in the power configuration in the southern Philippines. There is a likelihood of the rise of new political forces, particularly the newly formed political organisations of the MILF and various groups that are anticipated to compete in the electoral exercise in Mindanao. Although these new political formations may vie for political power, as shown in the power map, warlord politicians remain the most influential and powerful individuals. They have all the necessary political machinery to preserve their power and generate legitimacy as political rulers. They are equipped with immense material and even military infrastructures that can be used to ensure their victories in the elections. Some politicians of Mindanao are even perceived as charismatic traditional leaders by their loyal constituents.⁷⁸ The reconfiguration of the complex power structure may not be the immediate aim of the EU in Mindanao. Presumably, it does not matter who has the power, as long as its norms are diffused in this region of the Philippines.

Norms, although ideational, are powerful. They are less tangible (Nye 1990) owing to their vague and nebulous empirical referents. Nonetheless, they have the power to infiltrate social institutions and influence the conduct, beliefs and attitudes of actors in society (Boudet, Petesch, Turk and Thumala 2012; Diez 2005). Despite the intricate and complex attributes of power structures and some resistance from powerful actors, the efforts of the EU to diffuse norms may yet yield success in Mindanao. As an international norm entrepreneur, the EU through its partner NGOs has the ability to shape the perception of the public of what is normal (Diez 2005), including in the contested political environment of Mindanao. It has the capacity to mobilise influential local actors, such as the MILF, local NGOs and intellectuals, who are promoting liberal democratic norms as good and morally appealing to the local population. The deployment of credible local actors in the framing of transnational ideas makes global norms local (Acharya 2004), and therefore increases the prospect of success of norm diffusion. The EU is a potent entrepreneur of norms owing to its material power to grant incentives to local actors, who are willing to diffuse external normative values and ideas in the southern Philippines. For instance, through the HD Centre, MILF officials are socialised to a European style of democratic politics by facilitating their travel to Brussels and their talk with key officials of the European Commission.⁷⁹ NGO partners of the

⁷⁸ Interview with the Director of the Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao-Mindanao State University, General Santos City, 22 August 2016.

⁷⁹ Interview with the Philippine Programme Manager of the Henry Dunant Centre, Ortigas City, 9 August 2016.

EU, particularly the Conciliation Resources and IAG,⁸⁰ are able to engage local political leaders and traditional rulers in participatory governance and strategic dialogues in Mindanao. Local actors, particularly the MILF and politicians, are intelligent enough to take advantage of external interventions, like those from the EU, which would likely enhance their prestige and legitimacy. They will not simply allow foreign ideas and initiatives that are detrimental and harmful to their power and status in Mindanao.

The international identity of the EU as a normative power is more important than the outcome of its actions in Mindanao. Ian Manners (2002), the scholar who framed the idea of Europe as a normative power, emphasises the ontological quality of the EU as an actor involved in changing norms in the international system and in propagating its own normative values in many parts of the globe. Mindanao is a strategic playground for the EU to project its image as a benevolent normative power to the rest of the international community. The intrastate conflict in the southern Philippines is a domestic issue. However, it has been highly sensationalised on the international stage due to the complexities of the problem and the deep involvement of various international players. Consequently, Mindanao is a strategic social laboratory for the EU through its partner NGOs to develop its normative identity further and to nurture its agency as a potent international liberal peacebuilding player (see Richmond, Björkdahl and Kappler 2011). After all, power structures do evolve. On a long-term basis, a new generation of leaders will likely rise to manage and dominate politics and governance in Mindanao.⁸¹ The EU is investing its efforts to socialise the youth and even the children to European normative notions of peace, development and democracy. There is a strong possibility that these external norms will be internalised by the succeeding generations of people, particularly the children of the local political elite and rebel leaders, in the volatile conflict-prone communities in Mindanao. The internalisation of normative values and ideas by norm-takers is the best way to consolidate the impacts of norm diffusion (Xiaoyu 2012). Therefore, it is an imperative for the EU and its liberal agents to bombard the local population persistently with moral norms until they internalise them.

In summary, all these trends – acceptance, hybridisation and rejection – are currently competing. Some norms are likely to succeed, some may fail, and some are being hybridised as the competition plays out across a generation.

⁸⁰ Interview with a Programme Manager of the Institute for Autonomy and Governance, Cotabato City, 21 July 2016.

⁸¹ Interview with the Programme Manager on Mindanao, EU Delegation to the Philippines, Makati City, 12 August 2016.

6.8 | Material power of the EU and incentives for NGOs

The normative nature of the EU's power is demonstrated in its campaign to diffuse liberal principles, particularly peace, democracy and human rights. Richmond, Björkdahl and Kappler (2011) argue that the ability of the EU as a peacebuilding player involved in conflict resolution and rebuilding of conflict-afflicted communities relies heavily on its financial capacity to provide aid. It supports the policy of the UN that promotes rehabilitation and development projects implemented in post-conflict communities as peace dividends, which are crucially important in the immediate aftermath of conflict. Peace dividends have become an imperative in the promotion of stability and the containing of conflict in war-prone communities. From the standpoint of the UN, peace dividends are necessary to “reduce social tensions through the provision of tangible, needed services, create incentives for non-violent behaviour and support statebuilding efforts at critical junctures in the peace process” (United Nations 2012, 2). The peace dividend is a construct that has been introduced by liberal actors, like the United Nations and EU, as a tool to protect and preserve the integrity of the liberal peacebuilding model. Moreover, foreign aid is the ultimate material operator in the delivery of peace dividends to conflict-ridden communities. It also gives the foreign community tremendous power in post-conflict zones, even those with quite viable states such as the Philippines.

As a liberal peace agent and norm entrepreneur, the EU exhibits its remarkably high material power in enterprising liberal norms and building liberal institutions in the Philippines. It can be argued that the EU is employing its material power as an incentive to a wide range of actors who are willing to participate in its democracy promotion project in the conflict zone of Mindanao. Unlike other international peacebuilding actors, especially the United States of America, Australia and Japan, which have a ground presence in Mindanao, the EU's support for the peace process is basically mediated through other organisations. Various liberal agents, particularly NGOs, are commissioned to implement peacebuilding initiatives on behalf of the EU. Arguably, aid is a powerful tool in enjoining various agents to continually reinforce and support the EU's liberal agenda in Mindanao. Moreover, aid is crucially important for the sustainability of liberal actors and institutions, especially development NGOs, which are heavily dependent on the financial assistance of donors for their survival. The power of the EU to incentivise its liberal agents is illustrated in the table below.

Table 8. EU grants to NGOs

Implementing Organisations	Name of Projects	Duration	EU Contracted Amount (€)	Total Cost (€)
Domain: New Democracy and Human Rights				
Save the Children (UK)	Spaces for Peace: Strengthening the protection of children in the province of Maguindanao, Philippines	2017-2020	600,000.00	660,000.00
Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research Inc.	Community-based Approach in Combating Child Labor in Hazardous Industries in Plantations and Mining	2013-2016	403,696.07	453,900.91
National Council of Churches in the Philippines	Confronting Challenges on Human Rights Defenders in the Philippines	2015-2018	534,717.00	594,130.00
Rural Missionaries of the Philippines Northern Mindanao	Healing the Hurt: Unleashing Interfaith Initiatives to Combat Discrimination, Human Rights Violation and Impunity against the Lumads of Mindanao, Philippines	2014-2017	623,766.65	623,766.65
<i>Člověk V Tísni OPS</i> (Czech Republic)	Joint Action for Land Rights	2016-2018	600,000.00	800,000.00
Relief International (UK)	Promoting and Protecting Indigenous Human Rights in Bangladesh and the Philippines	2017-2018	1,000,000.00	1,052,972.02
Domain: Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities				
Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas Inc.	Consolidating CSO Networks for Citizens' Engagement toward Participatory and Accountable Governance for Poverty Reduction	2015-2018	881,087.00	978,985.00
Plan International (UK)	Strengthening Social Protection, Resilience and Inclusive Development for Marginalised People through Citizens and Civil Society Engagement	2016-2018	1,000,000.00	1,335,796.33
<i>Fundacion Accion Contra El Hambre</i> (Italy)	Empowered Participatory Governance towards Progress in North Cotabato Communities	2013-2017	689,927.52	919,952.68
Domain: Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace				
<i>Fondation Suisse de Deminage</i> (Switzerland)	Mine Action Support to the Peace Process	2015-2017	1,350,000.00	1,350,000.00
Non-Violent Peaceforce (France)	Supporting the Mindanao Peace and Transition Processes through enhancing capacity of peace structures, early warning early response mechanism and local conflict prevention actors	2015-2017	1,550,000.00	1,550,000.00
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (Germany)	Bangsamoro Political Party Building	2015-2017	550,000.00	550,000.00

Source: International Cooperation and Development, European Commission (2017b)

Table 8 shows some of the major international and local NGOs that are involved in peace operations in the southern Philippines and that were financed by the EU from 2013 to 2020. These different projects are designed to promote and sustain peace in Mindanao and are funded under several instruments of the EU: namely, Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace, Development Cooperation Instrument, and European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. The EU has the ongoing desire to finance NGO projects that are geared towards peace and democracy promotion and the advancement of human rights and fundamental freedom, especially those of vulnerable and indigenous groups in the conflict zone. It has been noticed that most of the INGOs that are acting as service providers for the EU are influential NGOs based in Europe. Some of these NGOs have expertise and technology that are rarely found in the Philippines, such as the ability of the Swiss NGO, FSD to eliminate landmines in conflict zones. It is worth noting that the EU is keen to support not only local NGOs, but also church-based and non-profit organisations that are seeking to foster reconciliation among warring groups in Mindanao, and to promote the human rights of children, indigenous cultural minorities and other marginalised groups in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao.

Finally, the EU shows benevolence, which reinforces its normative or soft power in the conflict zone by being the biggest donor to the MTF. From 2005 to 2017, it donated USD 17.661 million to the MTF, which is intended to finance development investment in war-torn communities in Mindanao (World Bank 2016). In addition, despite the tirades from President Duterte,⁸² the EU is willing to continue giving its grant for Mindanao, particularly to fund reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-devastated Marawi that was previously occupied by the IS-affiliated Maute Group (Esmaguél 2017c). As observed, ordinary people, who are frequent victims of displacement due to protracted armed conflict, have noticed the EU's contributions to peace and stability in the southern Philippines.⁸³ The EU's aid is seen as a strategic incentive for NGOs to continually facilitate the localisation of transnational norms and the socialisation of the different actors on the grounds (rebels, local politicians, children, indigenous people) to liberal norms, values and institutions. These values of peace, democracy, human rights and civil society are the defining features of the EU's normative power in Mindanao.

⁸² The EU strongly criticised Duterte's drug war policy.

⁸³ Interview with the Chairman of the NGO coalition in Mindanao, Davao City, 18 January 2018.

6.9 | Concluding thoughts

The case of Mindanao illustrates that the EU seeks to diffuse liberal norms and principles in the conflict zone through the assistance of its various socialising agents due to their agency to engage in a game of power in Mindanao. It is worth noting that other donors do the same, but it is the EU as a donor that is being studied in this research. NGOs are found to be the most influential liberal agents commissioned by the EU to facilitate hybrid peace formation in Mindanao. Based on Acharya's framework, NGOs are the strategic actors who can apply the necessary adjustments to liberal-democratic norms and make them compatible with extant beliefs and local practices. These NGOs are heavily involved in the peace operations to deliver peace dividends to conflict-afflicted civilians on behalf of the EU. They are also implementing projects, designed according to the liberal peacebuilding model, that put primacy upon the normative values of democracy, human rights, civil society and rule of law. These liberal values are the essential features of the emerging European Union Peacebuilding Framework, as identified by Richmond et al. (2011).

NGOs are liberal agents with a high utilitarian value for the EU in establishing its presence and demonstrating its normative or civilian power in Mindanao. They are helpful in the construction and portrayal of the EU's positive image as an altruistic international peacebuilding actor with no military agenda in the southern Philippines. To commission NGOs as public service contractors is a strategic mechanism in the delivery of several EU-funded projects to communities marred by violent conflict. Moreover, NGOs are found to be effective channels through which to engage with the various power brokers in the conflict zone, especially the rebel commanders and warlord politicians. Some of these NGOs are able to penetrate complex power structures and perilous political spaces in the conflict zone. NGOs are also able to collaborate with illiberal agents, such as rebels and traditional leaders. Communication channels between the EU and MILF and the inclusion of the MILF and some MNLF leaders in the EU project on political party development in the Bangsamoro are all facilitated by NGOs.

Peace operations are expensive and it is strategically important for the EU to commission NGOs with the commodification of peace. It creates an impression that the peace operations are conducted in a democratic fashion as they involve civil society actors, particularly NGOs. It is also tactically useful to employ NGOs in manufacturing consent and legitimacy for the EU's civilising mission to attain peace and promote development in Mindanao. NGOs are perceived to be the representatives of the poor and marginalised groups in conflict-ridden communities, hence they

are strategic agents in facilitating a benevolent image and legitimacy of EU's role as an international peacebuilding player.

The commodification of peacebuilding constitutes an inducement for NGOs to act as the EU's primary agents in the diffusion and hybridisation of transnational norms and ideas in the southern Philippines. They are responsible for building congruence by grafting and pruning foreign liberal-democratic ideas so that they will fit local normative structures in Mindanao. They have the capacity to frame and graft external norms in a way that will make these foreign ideas and values appear local and, therefore, not harmful and detrimental to extant beliefs and institutions. The NGOs are also necessary in finding local champions who are receptive to liberal norms, especially, in this case, the MILF leaders, the women and the youth leaders. These local actors are constantly socialised towards European liberalism, which they perceive as beneficial in enhancing their prestige and legitimacy, as prospective political entrants in the power game in Mindanao. They are strategic local players in the reproduction of local resonance of transnational norms and ideas, even in isolated communities of Mindanao. The Mindanao case demonstrates that these key local actors facilitate hybridisation by translating foreign concepts associated with liberal peacebuilding into local languages. They also apply political and cultural filters to reject elements of liberal norms that are not compatible with local beliefs and practices, which is a mechanism for hybridisation.

The diffusion of liberal norms may not generate immediate effects through the EU's democracy promotion campaign. The intricate power structures in this part of the Philippines, that emphasise the dominance of warlord politicians and their ability to resist foreign norms, constitute several stumbling blocks that prevent liberal norms from immediately reconfiguring the existing complex political order. Nonetheless, this norm diffusion of the EU and its partner NGOs will likely produce power transformation impacts, on a long-term basis, when the succeeding generations of political actors become more inclined to internalise and to amplify liberal-democratic norms and values that are harmonised or hybridised with extant beliefs and institutions. Therefore, the efforts of the EU and its partner NGOs towards hybrid peace formation is likely to generate a unique set of norms in post-BOL Mindanao.

Chapter VII

Conclusion: Liberal Peacebuilding and Resilience of Local Power in the Southern Philippines

This thesis has addressed the question of why hybrid peace formations are characterised by tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes that are produced and constantly reproduced due to the complex interface of the liberal peace and extant power in conflict-ridden polities. Since development NGOs are known as agents of the liberal peace mobilised by donor agencies and IGOs, this thesis explains the baffling and sometimes anomalous functions of NGOs in democratising conflict-ridden Mindanao. Moreover, this study investigates the motivations of NGOs in transforming the current power structures, which are central in conflict transformation, by transplanting and localising liberal-democratic norms in the conflict zone. This study also explains the reaction of local power brokers, especially local strongmen and extremist rebels, to the liberal norm diffusion.

The case study of Mindanao contributes to the existing debate about liberal peacebuilding in conflictual and post-conflict societies, especially those that are under complex political order. This research sets out the nature, nodes and geographies of power in war-torn Mindanao, which constitutes complexities to the operations of liberal peacebuilding of NGOs and other external peacebuilding actors. Investigating the nature of existing power on the ground is largely neglected in the peacebuilding literature because of the perceived dangers associated with the conduct of intensive ethnographic fieldwork in a perilous and contested political environment. This study is also significant in the light of the emergence of hybridity in peacebuilding, as it illustrates the process of how local power and politics in conflictual societies resist, distort, ignore, adapt and modify key tenets of liberalism. This study relies on first-hand ethnographic data that are gathered through intensive fieldwork in conflict-affected communities in the southern Philippines and used to address the research questions in depth.

This research is highly relevant due to the ongoing interest of the international community in funding NGO liberal peacebuilding operations despite the existence of an active armed conflict in the southern Philippines. Moreover, this thesis is timely because the peace negotiation between

the Philippine government and the MILF is currently unfolding so that it allows greater involvement of IGOs and NGOs in a multi-track peacebuilding scheme. The enactment of the Bangsamoro Organic Law in the Philippine Congress paved the way for the creation of the Bangsamoro as a new political entity. Hence, more foreign aid and greater NGO involvement are expected in peacebuilding operations because the Bangsamoro autonomous region is already in existence. Finally, the study is of particular relevance in conflictual and post-conflict communities in the global south where the dominant liberal peacebuilding model drives the operations of peacebuilding actors, particularly NGOs. The key lessons derived from the Mindanao case are useful in devising context-specific mechanisms for NGOs operating in contested environments such as Maluku, West Papua, Ambon in Indonesia, and Pattani in the southern Thailand, all of which are marred by intrastate conflict at the sub-national level.

7.1 | Solving the conundrums

This thesis argues that the Bangsamoro has a complex political regime because it is a container of a variety of formal-liberal, informal-illiberal and formal-illiberal forms of power. The complicity of the political order of Mindanao conforms to the Foucauldian characterisation of the ubiquitous and diffused nature of power due to the existence of several power nodes and centres. The conflict zone in the region is a shared domain of various power brokers and gatekeepers, especially warlord politicians, rebel commanders and terrorist personnel. Asymmetric power relations are evident among participants in a power game that features the dominance of local strongmen. Consequently, less powerful groups have become subjects of constant marginalisation and exclusionary political arrangements in the Bangsamoro.

The power map of Mindanao highlights the resilience of the political authority and the legitimacy of local rulers with multiple sources of power. These local strongmen are relatively successful in wielding, imposing and sustaining authority and legitimacy in the southern Philippines as they have the capacity to harness multi-factoral and fungible power simultaneously on legal, traditional and charismatic grounds. Moreover, these powers may even come from illicit sources as evidenced by the alleged cases of corruption of peacebuilding aid and the rampant proliferation of a shadow economy in Mindanao. Local rulers are in an advantaged position whereby they can monopolise political leadership in their respective bailiwicks, as they have the capacity to exert hostile and coercive power by using their private armies against potential enemies. These enemies may include NGOs and external actors whose agenda, particularly human rights, in Mindanao is perceived to be harmful and detrimental to the power and interests of warlord politicians.

This complex power structure has important implications for the liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs and other external organisations in Mindanao. NGOs have to deal with illiberal actors, particularly warlord politicians and rebel commanders who primarily determine and dictate the rules of the game in their own strongholds. Consent from these local strongmen is crucially important for NGOs to establish their presence safely on the ground, help the war ravaged population, and in turn, satisfy the demands of donor agencies. Nonetheless, the closeness of the NGOs to local kingpins has led to scandalous practices in the conflict zone. This research provides evidence that the aid-funded peacebuilding projects of NGOs can be corrupted and hijacked by illiberal local rulers at the expense of ordinary civilians, who have frequently suffered the brunt of violent armed conflict in the region.

Mindanao's power map also shows that NGOs, including the large and highly influential ones, are deeply embedded in the local power structures and politics of the Bangsamoro. These NGOs have strategically learned a variety of mechanisms to engage effectively with local warlords and rebel commanders in the provision of social services to vulnerable and powerless people in the region. The participation of NGOs in emergency relief operations for conflict-riddled civilians is of immense value in the face of the dysfunctional governance and abject poverty in the Bangsamoro. NGO humanitarian assistance is of great importance as the socio-economic conditions in Mindanao are so dire, which justifies the direct interventions of various external organisations in peacebuilding operations. Cognizant of local custom in the region, NGOs tap the clan structure to gain access to the networks of local strongmen, particularly warlord politicians and rebel leaders. By doing so, some NGOs are able to penetrate closed spaces in the Bangsamoro where they can negotiate and interact with local strongmen and coercive actors with multiple sources of power. There are NGOs that are sufficiently innovative to establish connections with local power brokers. Some of them have found political champions inside the family structures of warlord politicians, rebel commanders and other traditional rulers on the ground where the actual conflict is transpiring. Finally, the intricate power structures in conflict-affected communities of Mindanao, as shown in the power map, constitute a precarious environment in which NGOs and donor agencies engage in the liberal peacebuilding operations. Coercive and hostile actors are not limited to warlords, private armies and rebels. Terrorist and radicalised groups such as IS, Al-Qaeda and Abu Sayyaf have taken root, which further complicates the politico-security landscape of Mindanao.

The contemporary design of the cultural turn in peacebuilding, which drives the operations of neoliberal donor agencies and NGOs, emphasises the crucial involvement of local forces in hybrid peace governance. Critical peacebuilding theorists claim that the inclusion of exogenous forces and local power enhances the practical value and ideational legitimacy of liberal peacebuilding, because it fosters the ownership and empowerment of actors on the ground where conflict is part of their day-to-day reality. The significant attention given to extant beliefs and institutions is claimed to bring emancipation to the overly-stressed and ethically-bankrupt liberal peace paradigm. Nonetheless, putting too much emphasis on local forces constitutes the danger of romanticising and essentialising the role of local power brokers in conflictual societies, who, in most cases are illiberal, hostile and recalcitrant towards democratic norms and practices.

Based on the case of Mindanao, this study reveals that hybrid peace formation does not present an emancipatory character of the liberal peace, and this is contrary to the claim of its proponents. Ethnographic and empirical evidence from the southern Philippines strongly suggests the production and reproduction of a negative hybrid peace with particular reference to liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs and donors. Hybrid peace formation employed by NGOs and IGOs in the context of domestic armed conflict in Mindanao is characterised by tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes, mainly due to incongruence between exogenous and endogenous epistemologies of peace. The promotion of human rights, good governance, rule of law and other democratic functions of NGOs do not easily receive appreciation and acceptance from different actors on the ground. Rather, these democratic functions face resistance and opposition from local power brokers, which distorts and modifies the central tenets of liberalism. The findings of this research provide the evidence of a cohabitation or confluence of the liberal paradigm, and a local version of peacebuilding: hence the existence of hybrid peace formation in present-day Mindanao.

The interface of the liberal peace paradigm and extant beliefs and institutions has generated different forms of tension in the conflict zone. Local strongmen, particularly warlord politicians, have expressed resistance to the liberal peacebuilding of NGOs and donors due to the prospect of reconfiguring the current power structures in the Bangsamoro. The construction of more democratic spaces to facilitate inclusion of less powerful groups in the public sphere is a chief and redeeming aspect of liberal peacebuilding. However, the emergence of created and claimed spaces where less powerful and disenfranchised groups can participate in governance is perceived by local strongmen to be harmful and threatening to their current political status and power in the southern Philippines. Powerlessness among ordinary civilians who are frequent victims of violence is used

to the advantage of local strongmen to preserve their power and legitimacy. As long as these war-riven civilians are dependent on patrons for security and economic benefits, these strongmen are likely to sustain the resilience of their political authority in the Bangsamoro. They are equipped with enormous political, economic and military power, from both legal and illegal sources, to maintain their prominent status in the hierarchy of power in the region.

The dilemmas confronting the liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs are inexorably linked to the complex power structures and precarious security condition in the region. The efforts of NGOs to democratise Mindanao are perceived as a major threat to the power and legitimacy of warlord politicians. These local rulers have a strong aversion towards competitive democratic exercise, particularly elections. The emergence of political opponents and entry of new participants in the power game is seen by warlord politicians as an insult to their political status and legitimacy. The massacre of some members of the Mangudadatu family by the Ampatuan clan in the Maguindanao Province in 2009 provides clear evidence that local strongmen are unwilling to accommodate electoral competition. In this case, the Ampatuan clan did not hesitate to exploit coercive power to eliminate their political rivals.

Aside from the fact that local strongmen are not in favour of constructing and widening democratic spaces in the Bangsamoro, this study provides an evidence-based explanation of why the liberal peacebuilding of NGOs and donors is facing many problems in the conflict zone. First, warlord politicians perceived liberal peacebuilding operations as an empowerment of insurgent groups, especially the MILF, because it had signed the CAB with the Government of the Philippines. Multi-million-dollar peacebuilding aid has been pouring in into MILF-controlled communities as a material incentive to the armed group for its desire to resolve conflict peacefully. For warlords, the preferential treatment extended to the MILF by liberal peace agents represents harm to their interests because, firstly, it is building the power base of insurgent leaders who will eventually vie for political power in the Bangsamoro. Secondly, NGO liberal peacebuilding operations have minimal impacts on democratisation in Mindanao. Because of pressures and threats from local power brokers, the NGOs are more inclined to perform the less complicated and non-threatening components of liberal peacebuilding, such as the provision of humanitarian assistance, poverty alleviation and community-based education for the war-stricken population. In most cases, these activities of NGOs are favourable in building a positive image; hence they boost the popularity of local politicians. Thirdly, there is a dearth of NGOs who, in the face of constant insecurity and threats from local strongmen, are in a position to execute extremely important liberal

functions, particularly human rights protection, governance reform to combat corruption and election monitoring. Finally, the peacebuilding operations of the NGOs rely heavily on technocratic solutions that allow large and influential NGOs to rise into a status of prominence. However, this study demonstrates that, to some degree, reliance on technocratic expertise has become counterproductive to liberal peacebuilding in Mindanao, especially in its objective of facilitating the empowerment of civil society at the grassroots. Some local NGOs are starting to shut down or have become dysfunctional because they are unable to secure funding from donors who prefer to outsource their services to affluent and large NGOs, particularly in security sector reform, prevention of violent extremism, political party development, and promotion of transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms.

This study confirms the widespread claim in the development literature that civil society is characterised by internal contradiction. Ethnographic evidence from Mindanao shows that liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs are overlaid with a myriad paradoxes. Their *modus operandi* in this war-ridden region is sometimes in sharp contradiction to their identity as agents of the liberal peace. To operate successfully and safely in the conflict-affected communities, they have learned how to exploit the opportunity of working within the clientelistic and patronage networks of illiberal and hostile strongmen. Some NGOs have even been accused of colluding with local politicians and rebel leaders to corrupt peacebuilding aid that is meant to transform conflict and help powerless civilians. Working within the kinship structure and other informal institutions controlled by local power brokers has consequently compelled NGOs to accept uncomfortable trade-offs, where strongmen capture their peace projects. Based on the context of Mindanao, this study reveals that NGO peacebuilding interventions that are deemed liberal in character actually facilitate the production and reproduction of negative liberal-local hybrid peace that can undermine liberal values and violate liberal institutions.

The overwhelming presence of prominent international NGOs in the conflict zone arouses suspicion and distrust among civilians and power brokers that these NGOs are involved in the securitisation of liberal peacebuilding. There is a growing accusation against NGOs as “shadow peacebuilders” (Kostic 2017, 120) because their principal purpose in Mindanao is not just to facilitate development and provide humanitarian assistance, but also to enable counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism. As revealed in this study, Mindanao is a major hub of notorious terrorist organisations in Southeast Asia that have affiliation to the Islamic State.

The findings of this research highlight the contradictory character of the NGOs that are operating in the region. They are a double-edged sword, acting as a force for good on the one hand, and as a destabilising agent on the other. NGOs are praised for their remarkable contributions in helping the marginalised and excluded groups that are frequent victims of horizontal and vertical forms of violence. They are the main channels of humanitarian and relief assistance in the Bangsamoro, enabling members of the international donor community to engage in peacebuilding operations. Controversially, this study provides strong evidence that some NGOs are in fact a destabilising force in the southern Philippines. There are instances where NGOs reinforce pre-existing tensions between warlord politicians and insurgent leaders, and among feuding political clans at the village level. Due to their inclination to tap the clan structure in the delivery of peacebuilding projects at the community level, they inadvertently sustain patrimonialism, which is an influential informal institution in Muslim communities. Patrimonialism is detrimental to the growth of a pluralist democracy. The peacebuilding interventions of the NGOs are reportedly captured and owned by local strongmen to bolster their power, prestige and legitimacy. Finally, not all NGOs in the region are agents of the liberal peace. Mindanao also hosts NGOs who are presenting themselves as humanitarian organisations, but their main intention is actually to support terrorist outfits financially and to recruit *mujahidin* fighters from among the youth. These NGOs are allegedly active in propagating Wahhabi-Salafi extremist ideology that calls for the rise of militant Islam and incites sectarian violence. Islamic fundamentalists are also trying to prevent and counter the spread of liberal-democratic ideas that are promoted by NGOs in the southern Philippines.

Finally, the study presents evidence that NGOs are widely utilised by various IGOs and by the supranational organisation, the EU, in attempting to diffuse liberal normative ideas, practices and structures in the Bangsamoro. Owing to the capacity of NGOs to engage in a complex game of power, they have become the strategic agents in diffusing liberal norms in the conflict zone in a smart and subtle fashion. Norm diffusion is a slow and arduous process used by NGOs to transform illiberal and coercive power structures in the conflict zone. It is argued in this study that NGOs, especially those commissioned by the EU, are targeting illiberal and coercive actors, such as rebel commanders and traditional rulers, particularly the younger generation of leaders in Mindanao. MILF leaders and some traditional rulers appear to be receptive to liberal ideas: hence the process of norm diffusion through hybridisation is yielding some success. EU-funded NGOs are able to find champions among influential leaders in the conflict zone who are acting as entrepreneurs of democratic norms. The rational explanation behind the MILF's positive attitude towards liberal norms is that the EU is beneficial in reinforcing the legitimacy, prestige and

international popularity of the armed group. Being the biggest donor of the Mindanao Trust Fund, the EU through its NGO partners has demonstrated material power that incentivises the MILF for its cooperation in peacefully ending the conflict in Mindanao. Nonetheless, the reception shown by the MILF to the EU does not guarantee the concrete success of norm diffusion. It can be surmised as the MILF's strategic propaganda to legitimise its cause and agenda as an emerging political organisation that can offer alternative leadership to that of traditional warlord politicians. It is documented in this study that local power brokers and gatekeepers, particularly warlord politicians, perceive the liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs in Mindanao as harmful and threatening to their power and interests, and that explains their resistance and objection to external peacebuilding interventions.

Power transformation is of immense value in conflict transformation. To transform intricate power structures in the Bangsamoro, NGOs have innovative strategies for building congruence of foreign liberal ideas into the local normative structures in the conflict zone. The ingenuity of NGOs in diffusing norms is seen in the way they frame and graft liberal ideas and practices to make them appear local, and to appear not to harm and threaten extant beliefs and institutions. Based on ethnographic data, there are prospects for norm diffusion to yield success in the long run. NGOs are focusing on younger generations of political actors who will become champions of liberal norms as a way of democratising Mindanao. This new breed of politicians, including those from warlord clans, are more inclined to internalise and amplify liberal democratic ideas and practices because they are beneficial in reinforcing their legitimacy, or to hybridise them with an aim to maintain power using new sets of complex power. The positive reception of local leaders towards liberal norms is crucial in consolidating democracy after decades of armed conflict in the southern Philippines.

7.2 | Implications for *sofia and praxis*

This ethnographic case study of Mindanao sheds some light on solving the academic puzzle in the peacebuilding literature brought about by a dearth of studies that pay attention to local power in the attempt to understand the epistemological strengths and weaknesses, as well as the practical value of the dominant liberal peacebuilding paradigm. This research provides evidence that the liberal peace thesis, which has been previously used to analyse the dynamics of interstate war, is a well-suited theoretical foundation that is applicable in the context of intrastate or domestic conflict. Its referents are regularly embedded in the peace operations of NGOs in the southern Philippines. However, the liberal peacebuilding operations of NGOs and donors in the region are

saddled with tensions, dilemmas and paradoxes because of its incompatibilities and incongruence with extant normative structures and interests of local power brokers who primarily dictate the rules of the game in the conflict zone.

Hybrid peace formation, which is the result of resistance, distortion and modification of liberal values and principles by local power in Mindanao, does not present emancipation to the liberal peace, rather it depicts a scenario where NGOs contribute to the ongoing production and reproduction of a liberal-local hybrid peace that is neither emancipatory nor transformative of coercive forms of power. Based on evidence from the ground, liberal peacebuilding interventions are favourable in reinforcing the resilience of the political prestige, legitimacy and power of local strongmen, who are mainly composed of warlord politicians and rebel commanders. Due to the precarious security imperative, NGOs cannot escape the negative meddling of local rulers with multiple sources of power in their operations. For them to satisfy the demands of their donors to aid the conflict-stricken population, they typically tap the clan structure, but undermine the harsh impacts of clientelism, patronage and patrimonialism on liberal peacebuilding. Accommodating irregularities and compromise in peacebuilding operations is an undesirable trade-off, which NGOs accept in order to participate strategically in a game of power in Mindanao. NGOs entrusted with democratisation are caught between two sides with conflicting demands. On the one side, they are accountable to their donors to perform peacebuilding functions according to their menu and framework. On the other hand, they are prone to the control of local strongmen who intervene in their operations in the conflict zone. Despite good intentions, NGOs have limited agency to create and open democratic spaces where powerless groups can have meaningful participation and engagement in governance because the culture of impunity is rampant in present-day Bangsamoro.

This study encourages the rethinking of aspects of the current architecture of liberal peacebuilding, which prescribes that IGOs and central government take care of security sector reform, governance and judicial reform, and other major democracy promotion projects, while democratisation on the ground is mostly left to NGOs. As argued in this thesis, NGOs in Mindanao do not have enough agency to create and open more democratic spaces, nor to execute complicated and precarious liberal functions, particularly human rights promotion. As agents of the liberal peace, it is an imperative for NGOs to facilitate conflict transformation by transforming illiberal and coercive actors into constituents of peace. This task of NGOs also involves the danger of reinforcing the power of local strongmen because of their dominant status in the conflict zone.

Although NGOs have made significant achievements, the Mindanao case in general demonstrates the limitation of the power of the liberal peace in a contested environment under complex political order, even if it is hybridised with extant power. As long as the complex power structure in Mindanao is not reconfigured in favour of rule of law, open democracy and plurality, NGOs will be continually faced with the dilemmas of reducing violence and facilitating access to justice and structural changes of conflict-ridden civilians, which are key indicators of conflict transformation (Lederach 2003).

The local or cultural turn or everyday peace that Richmond (2010) labelled as the latest political infrastructure of liberal peacebuilding, which suggests the emergence of post-liberalism in peacebuilding and gives primacy to local actors and extant beliefs and institutions, requires intensive investigation and substantial modification. The evidence drawn from the Bangsamoro reveals the serious danger of allowing local power brokers to have a major stake in peace operations. Putting too much trust in warlord politicians and rebel commanders to perform hybrid peace governance (the combination of illiberal and liberal mechanisms and formal and informal power) for peacebuilding presents a possibility of romanticising and essentialising the role of local strongmen. These local rulers, as argued in this study, are more concerned with preserving their political, military and economic interests, and they have a strong aversion to sharing powers with others. The desire of local strongmen to monopolise power is certainly detrimental to the construction of a democratic regime that is tolerant of plurality and electoral competition. Nonetheless, hybrid peace governance should be entrusted to local rulers only if the central government and the international community are successful in decommissioning the BIAF of the MILF and dismantling all private armies in Mindanao. It may be that local rulers will cooperate in liberal peacebuilding and embrace democratic norms and ideas if military power is not at their disposal. It is clear that the local strongmen of Mindanao have the courage to resist and modify liberal peacebuilding and threaten its agents because they are equipped with the coercive power of violence through the use of their private armies.

This study argues that NGOs are likely to continue to function covertly as securitisation actors in Mindanao. As propounded by Newman (2009), the securitisation of peacebuilding sustains the dominance of liberal peacebuilding. The power map of Mindanao exposes the presence of terrorist and extremist personnel in the conflict zone. Mindanao is seen by IGOs and donors as a threat to global security: hence, donors have the desire to fund initiatives that seek to counter violent extremism, preserve stability and contain conflict. NGOs are neoliberal actors who are concerned

that their organisational survival depends upon following the money of donors. By securitising peacebuilding, they will likely remain relevant and benefit considerably from the lucrative peacebuilding enterprise. Although not obvious, NGO involvement in the securitisation of peacebuilding excites the suspicion and distrust of people in the conflict zone, fearing that they are mobilised by IGOs and donors for counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism, and not solely for humanitarian purposes.

Lastly, the passage of the Bangsamoro Organic Law in the Philippine Congress warrants the immediate start of the normalisation process that would decommission the armed faction of the MILF and dismantle the warlords' private militias. This new security arrangement should be taken advantage of by the NGOs, to strengthen their capacity to embark on sensitive and difficult liberal democratic functions, especially promoting human rights and combating corruption, and diffusing liberal democratic norms in the Bangsamoro autonomous region. The NGOs should help in consolidating democracy in the region through constituency and confidence-building that would prevent the relapse of violence, which is relatively common in post-conflict societies.

7.3 | Moving forward

This thesis opens a myriad of puzzles in the enterprise of peacebuilding that require further investigation and thorough analysis.

Firstly, it is the contention of this thesis that Mindanao is a lucrative theatre of action for NGOs, donors and IGOs. A slow and arduous peacebuilding intervention is ideal to sustain the strategic complexes of the liberal peace through a commodified mode of peacebuilding operations in the southern Philippines. Decades of conflict in this region appear to be a lucrative enterprise for major participants of liberal peacebuilding operations. Based on that claim, it would be interesting from the point of research to map out and analyse the strategic complexes of the liberal peace in the region from the standpoint of critical political economy and critical security. This research suggests that many individuals, groups, and institutions are benefitting from the ever-vibrant war economy and peacebuilding largesse in the southern Philippines. This study is important with the anticipated increase in peacebuilding aid due to the creation of the Bangsamoro and official entry of the MILF into politics because the BOL has secured congressional approval.

Secondly, with the increasing prominence of hybridity and hybridisation as theoretical lenses in peace research, it is important to conduct research in conflictual societies to determine whether a

liberal-local hybrid peace formation actually produces a syncretic normative framework. In short, there is a gap in the peacebuilding literature as to whether there is concrete evidence that the liberal peace undergoes syncretism with local practices. Hybridity and hybridisation are an underutilised theoretical lens in peacebuilding and they offer interesting prospects for further research. Mindanao is not only an ideal theatre of action for various peacebuilding organisations, it also a strategic theatre for theory due to the intricate configuration of power and interlocking interests of local actors in the conflict zone.

Thirdly, as mentioned in the conceptual framework of this thesis (see Chapter Two) on the assimilating character of the dominant liberal peace, further research should be conducted into the ways local knowledge of peace can be incorporated into western epistemologies of peace. The scientific inquiry should also investigate the role of NGOs, particularly those technocrats and members of the epistemic community, in hijacking endogenous peace mechanisms such as indigenous knowledge for community-based conflict resolution and traditional mechanisms for truth and reconciliation, to expand the ideational domain of the liberal peace.

Fourthly, due to limitation of the human ethics clearance for this research, the norm diffusion effort of NGOs that is captured in this study is limited to the perspectives of elite actors in the conflict zone, particularly warlords and rebel commanders. It is possible that the mechanisms used by NGOs to diffuse liberal-democratic norms might be frozen or only absorbed at the elite level and not able to cascade to the ground. It is expressed in this thesis that MILF leaders in Camp Darapanan have typically sanitised information from external actors that has been disseminated to their supporters at the grassroots. From the research point of view, it would be useful to conduct critical ethnography in the conflict zone to determine how ordinary civilians, BIFM/BIFF, MNLF and other radical groups react to liberal norms and ideas. However, this type of research is extremely dangerous and involves careful ethical and security considerations.

Finally, to contribute to the debate on peacebuilding, it would be academically thought-provoking to launch more research investigations in conflictual societies using a variety of innovative methodologies such as elicitive conflict mapping tools and other participatory research strategies. The conduct of empirical research using different methodologies is useful to draw objective assessments of the utility and futility of liberal peacebuilding in communities where violent conflict unfolds.

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List of Respondents of the Study

Name	Organisation	Position/Designation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
Ms. Starjoan Villanueva	Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao (AFRIM)	Executive Director	Davao City	8 July 2016
Mr. Romie Guialel	People's Coalition for ARMM Reform and Transformation	Secretary	Cotabato City	20 July 2016
Mr. Ernesto Casiple Jr.	UNICEF	Operations Officer	Cotabato City	20 July 2016
Mr. Miguel Peñalosa	Commission on Human Rights	Human Rights Investigator IV	Cotabato City	20 July 2016
Mr. Mike Kulat	Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society (CBCS)	Senior Programme Officer	Cotabato City	21 July 2016
Prof. Rey Danilo Lacson	Institute for Autonomy and Governance	Programme Manager	Cotabato City	21 July 2016
Mr. Quraish Langcap	Moro Islamic Liberation Front/ United Bangsamoro Justice Party	<i>Mujahid</i> /Party Officer	Maguindanao	22 July 2016
Mr. Ghazali Jaafar	Moro Islamic Liberation Front	First Vice Chairman/ Chair of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission	Maguindanao	22 July 2016
Dr. Ronald Galaez	Department of Health	Municipal Health Officer of Mother Kabuntalan, Maguindanao	Gen. Santos City	24 July 2016
Datu Mussolini Sinsuat Lidasan	Al-Qalam Institute, Ateneo De Davao University	Executive Director	Davao City	28 July 2016
Mrs. Evelyn Alibadbarin	Department of Education	Teacher, Ampatuan, Maguindanao	Polomolok, South Cotabato	29 July 2016
Mrs. Nelcy Onos	Department of Education	Teacher, Mamasapano, Maguindanao	Polomolok, South Cotabato	29 July 2016
Mrs. Jocelyn Lambac-Kanda	Plan International	Consultant	Gen. Santos City	30 July 2016
Mr. Gandhi Kinjiyo	United Bangsamoro Justice Party	Communications Officer	Sarangani Province	3 August 2016
Dr. Mayliline Fuentes	Department of Health	Municipal Health Officer of Datu Abdullah Sangki, Maguindanao	Gen. Santos City	3 August 2016
Dr. Melchorita Alvior	Department of Health	Municipal Health Officer, Maguindanao	Gen. Santos City	3 August 2016
Mr. Alimuiddin A. Hadjinor	Bangsamoro Development Authority	Regional Programme Manager	Gen. Santos City	27 July 2016

Mr. Tommy Nawa	Bangsamoro Development Authority/ United Bangsamoro Justice Party	Project Officer/ Executive Secretary	Gen. Santos City	27 July 2016
Dr. Mario J. Aguja	Mindanao State University/ Independent Decommissioning Body	Professor of Sociology/ Member, Independent Decommissioning Body	Gen. Santos City	7 August 2016
Atty. Miguel Camilo Montesa	Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue	Senior Programme Manager/ Country Representative	Pasig City	9 August 2016
Mr. Wilfredo Magno Torres	The Asia Foundation	Senior Programme Officer	Taguig City	9 August 2016
Mr. Hendrik Mollenhauer	Konrad Adenauer Stiftung	Project Manager	Makati City	11 August 2016
Dr. Steven Rood	The Asia Foundation	Country Representative	Pasig City	11 August 2016
Mr. Edoardo Manfredini	European Union Delegation to the Philippines	Programme Manager	Makati City	12 August 2016
Dr. Francisco Magno	Robredo Institute of Governance, De La Salle University	Executive Director/ Associate Professor of Political Science	Manila	12 August 2016
Dr. Ralph Brower	Florida State University/De La Salle University	Professor of Public Administration/ Visiting Fellow	Manila	12 August 2016
Lt. Rezel Mallo	Armed Forces of the Philippines	Lieutenant Senior Grade	Gen. Santos City	2 July 2016
Datu Roldan Babelon	Indigenous Political Structure of Arumanen-Manobo	Secretary General/ Tribal Chieftain	Davao City	23 April 2016
Mrs. Noemi Pimentel	National Anti-Poverty Commission	ARMM Focal Person	Davao City	23 April 2016
Mrs. Nurkaisa E. Alidain	Local Government Unit of Basilan	LGU Officer	Davao City	23 April 2016
Ms. Maricel Aguilar	United Nations Women	Programme Officer	Davao City	23 April 2016
Mr. Orson Sargado	Catholic Relief Services	Head of Office	Davao City	17 August 2016
Asst. Sec. Dickson Hermoso	OPAPP/Armed Forces of the Philippines	Assistant Secretary/ Commanding General	Gen. Santos City	18 August 2016
Prof. Rufa C. Guiam	Mindanao State University-General Santos City	Professor of Anthropology/ Director of the Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao	Gen. Santos City	22 August 2016
Ms. Marifah Agar	Bangsamoro Development Authority	Programme Manager	Gen. Santos City	19 August 2016
Lt. Col. Bim Quemado	Armed Forces of the Philippines Leadership Development Center	Head	Phone Interview	12 August 2016
Mr. Narciso Jover	Institute for Autonomy and Governance	Training Expert	Phone Interview	20 January 2018

Mrs. Patricia Sarenas	Mindanao Coalition of Development NGO Networks	Chairman	Davao City	18 January 2018
Asst. Prof. Neil Ryan Pancho	Centre for Politics and International Affairs, Ateneo de Davao University	Director	Davao City	19 January 2018
Atty. Haron Meling	Moro Islamic Liberation Front/ Bangsamoro Transition Commission	Lawyer/ Commissioner	Gen. Santos City	21 January 2018
Mr. Nelson Pelotin	United Nations Development Programme	Project Officer	Gen. Santos City	22 January 2018
2 nd Lt. Korina Dela Costa	Armed Forces of the Philippines	2 nd Lieutenant	Tawi-tawi	13 January 2018
Mr. Labualas Samrod Mamansual, Al Haj	Local Government of Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat	Former Mayor	Pasig City	22 November 2017
Asst. Prof. Alshadat Sabal	Mindanao State University	Assistant Professor of Political Science	Tawi-tawi	24 August 2017
Mr. Aljem Jaudinez	Mindanao State University	University Instructor/ Youth Leader	Tawi-tawi	12 January 2018
Mr. Nickmar M. Asjali	Mindanao State University	Student Government President	Personal Communication	25 August 2017